Wolfenberg

William Black

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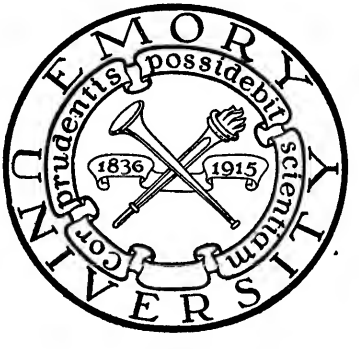

WOLFENBERG

BY

WILLIAM BLACK

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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WOLFENBERG.

CHAPTER I.

A DIP IN THE BOSPHORUS.

"THERE was once a man," says Peggy—here on deck in the early morning—and she is looking across the dark blue Ægean, towards the mountainous coast-line of Mitylene looming out from amongst sunlit and silver showers—"there was once a man who owned a great many houses in the sea-side town where he lived; and so extremely careful of his property was he that when he found himself about to die, he insisted upon being taken somewhere else, so that the death-rate of the watering-place shouldn't be in-

creased. Very thoughtful and prudent, wasn't he?"

Now when you have got hold of a good, capable l * * r, you should never interrupt. Silence is the surest encouragement. So Peggy proceeds:

"Yes; you think of such odd people when you lie awake in the morning. Did you ever hear of the hotel-keeper where there was only the one show-place in the neighbourhood—the cemetery; and his wife was buried there; and he had put up the most elaborate monument to her—carved marble, and cherubs, and gold letters, and all that; but as soon as the season was over, and his visitors all gone away, he used to bring that monument in-doors and keep it under cover, leaving a plain block of stone in its place. He was another economical man."

"Very."

"But the cruellest thing I ever heard of," she continues, in a grave and absent kind of

way, "was the man who was so anxious about his bric-à-brac. He was so afraid of having any of it destroyed that he spent years and years in forming a collection in duplicate; and when he had got that completed, he couldn't find a duplicate of himself to look after this second collection, and so he slowly pined away and died."

"Really!"

"Did I tell you that all those people were Scotch? Yes, they were; but I was almost afraid to mention it; for the fact is, the Scotch are so desperately penurious that they won't even let you have a little joke—at their expense. But never mind," says Peggy, cheerfully, "I can forgive them everything, because they don't drop their *h*'s: that covers a multitude of sins."

"Did you never hear of a Scotchman having dropped an *h*?"

"Never!"

"There was one. Ben Jonson. But perhaps

his family did it for him: most likely the Johnsons changed their name when they left Annandale."

"So Ben Jonson was a Scotchman? Shakespeare too, of course. I say," she goes on, in her irrelevant fashion, "have you been paying any attention of late to that young Mr. Verrinder? Really—really—he seems to me to presume just a little too much on his slight acquaintance with us; why, the way he seeks out my sister Emily—and keeps hanging about her all day long—if it were anybody but the Baby, one might almost imagine——"

"Don't you think it is a charming sight to see the two pretty dears together?"

At this Peggy looks up, startled.

"Oh, good gracious!—you don't mean——? No, no. That is quite too impossible! I know the Baby too well for that. The very last thing she would dream of! But, really, that young man is a little too forward—a

little too persistent; and she is so solemn and meditative—so much absorbed in her dreams of the saints—that she does not understand how there may be occasion for people to observe, and comment. Poor Baby! And yet it must be rather fine to live in a perpetual dreamland—— Oh, bother the child!—here she comes again—looking more awful and more majestic than any twenty dozen of Pallas Athenès!"

However, this was our good Sappho's morning: indeed, so excited was she by the near proximity of those Lesbian shores that she had forgot to go along and release Phaon from his durance vile. She kept mostly to the forward part of the vessel, walking about by herself, furtively writing on scraps of paper, and gazing across the blue waters to the low-lying hills under long levels of cumulus cloud and to the successive dark promontories appearing through white mists of rain. Nor was her enthusiasm likely to

abate when, after having passed Cape Baba, we drew gradually nearer to the yellow strip of Tenedos and to the "ringing plains of windy Troy." Fertile plains they seemed to us, with no very distinguishing feature beyond the odd little windmills of the wine-presses; but we knew that we had at least one person on board who could people those vague and vast sunlit distances with all kinds of shapes and phantoms. We surmised that the little black pencil was being kept busy. It is true that it was not until some time afterwards that we heard something of what had been vouchsafed to our perfervid one; and even then we could only guess at it from certain incoherent scraps that Peggy flung at us in a taunting and tantalising fashion.

'*For the splendour of Helen still shines upon Troy!*'

she would say proudly in passing. And then again in returning she would murmur under her breath—

'My spirit exults in delirious joy,
For the splendour of Helen still shines upon Troy!'

At last, seeing that these spurs and whets were of no avail, she came and said :

"I can easily understand why it is that literary people will not, or dare not, confide in each other. They know what they have to expect—nothing but jealousy, and disparagement, and envy. And yet if you only saw what I have here in my hand—I can tell you it is something. Just listen to this :—

'Blow, beautiful land, in a blazon of flowers!
Burn, basilisk sun, through the sweltering hours!
My spirit exults in delirious joy,
For the splendour of Helen still shines upon Troy!——'"

"Oh, go and pitch that trash overboard!"

"I knew it, I knew it," Peggy made answer, with much resignation. "In any other profession there is something like *esprit de corps*, and encouragement, and sympathy; but amongst literary folk there is nothing but

backbiting and hatred. It is really extraordinary. I do believe the only man of letters I ever heard of who had a grain of magnanimity in his nature was Sir Walter Scott—the only one. It's very sad." And thereupon, with something of a sigh, she left us; and that was all we ever got to know about Sappho's emotions on beholding the Plain of Troy.

By-and-by we entered the many-fortressed Dardanelles, and steamed along until we got as far as Chanak-Kalesi, where we slowed to let the Purser and the Doctor go ashore for pratique. During this interval a rowing-boat came out from the brilliant little town of red and white and yellow houses; and presently some of our indefatigable Orotanians were chaffering over the side of the vessel for specimens of that bizarre green-and-gold and black-and-gold pottery that has given Chanak a certain name amongst collectors. But either the manufacture has greatly fallen off of late

years, or the sailor-salesman had made a bad selection. We saw nothing to desire. On the other hand, Amélie Dumaresq was an eager, almost a furious, purchaser. She bought right and left; she seemed delighted with these barbaric extravagances of colour; she laughed at the grotesque water-jugs—at the open-jawed lions and tigers, tawny-hued, with slashes of gold and scarlet. Wolfenberg looked on, amused. Her mother feebly protested. In the end she carried away to her cabin a whole armful of monstrosities.

And that was about the last we saw of Amélie Dumaresq for the remainder of this afternoon—as we went on by Cape Abydos, and past Gallipoli, towards the wider waters of the Sea of Marmora. For the whole situation of affairs was about to reach a new development. It appeared that certain amiable lunatics on board had conceived the project of getting up an amateur concert; and, in seeking about for performers, they

had come, amongst others, to M. Paul Hitrovo. The young Russian admitted that he could fiddle a little; but said he had not brought his violin with him. They answered that there was no difficulty as to that; two or three of the musical Orotanians were possessed of violins; he could easily procure the loan of one. Still he hesitated—for he was lazily disposed; but presently he turned, with some little accession of interest, to Miss Dumaresq, who was standing by, and asked her whether she would play some concerted piece with him—some arrangement for violin and piano. She said at once that she would—if the piece could be found, and time given them for practising together. Then there was an instant call for music—Dvórak, Svendsen, Saint-Saëns being mostly in demand; but at last the young lady decided that she would try an arrangement of Liszt's *Rhapsodie Hongroise,* with which Hitrovo professed himself familiar. And forthwith they

set to work. They were seen no more on deck that afternoon. If you happened to be going by an open skylight, and paused to listen, you could hear sounds from below—the staccato notes of the piano, the long-drawn sweep of the violin; while some of those who went down for tea remained to listen to this rehearsal. If Amélie Dumaresq was not much of a singer, she was at least an accomplished pianist. And as for the young Russian? Well, the report that came up of his violin performance was quite enthusiastic. At all events, those two had now found a congenial occupation for themselves, which enabled them to have as much of each other's society as they could possibly desire. Nor was it imperative that they should confine themselves to practising for the forthcoming concert. One of our musical young ladies (the one who had lent her violin) came up with the announcement that Mr. Hitrovo had just been playing the air of a Russian love

song—so quaint, so simple, so melodious as to be altogether entrancing. And why should we be satisfied with that *Rhapsodie Hongroise?* Would not somebody make bold to ask him to play some of the Russian *Volkslieder?*

Now, if any of us had grown weary of perpetual sunlight and luminous blue seas, a change was at hand—a change sharp and decisive. Next morning, when we went on deck, we found the vessel being swept from stem to stern by torrents of rain; the crests of the waves torn into spindrift by blowing gusts of wind; seagulls dipping and soaring and gleaming white against the sombre and stormy sky. And it was with these unfamiliar accompaniments that we glided past the Seven Towers, past the domes and minarets of Stamboul, past the mosques of Sultan Achmet and Santa Sofia, past the long white buildings and the gardens of Seraglio Point; finally, as we opened up the Golden Horn, with its bridges, its shipping,

its terraced hills, and its great Suleimanieh of Suleiman the Magnificent, we gradually ceased from further motion, and cast anchor in the green waters of the Bosphorus. It was all a bewilderment. Whence and whither had fled the City of many Dreams—rose-tinted, fair-shining, set in silent and ineffable beauty betwixt earth and heaven? There certainly was some kind of city — dark, spectral, phantasmal, behind these veils of flying mists and rain; for we could make out domes and spires and far-reaching panoramic heights reaching into the louring sky; but they were only vaguely visible; while around us there was nothing but a maddening confusion of hurry and clamour and squalor—puffing steam-tenders, grimy tugs, pertinacious police-boats, swarming caiques, with steam-whistles shrieking, funnels pouring forth volumes of smoke, and officials in streaming black waterproofs shouting and gesticulating through the prevailing din.

And here were we, a poor huddled group of creatures seeking shelter under the boat-platform abaft the bridge, while Peggy was asking ruefully if this was Greenock that we had reached at last. But Amélie Dumaresq, on the other hand, was wholly and entirely delighted; her eloquent black eyes were full of an eager interest; she shook the dripping rain from her hair—paying no heed.

"Isn't it splendid!" she cried, looking out on that ceaselessly-moving phantasmagoria of whirling clouds and smoke, and swift-hurrying black funnels, and lapping green water. "Not a trace of the chromo-lithograph! Not the least suggestion of the traditional old pictures. This is the real Constantinople. This is as real as Fulton Ferry. Isn't it a stroke of luck, Ernest!"

"It is a special interposition of providence, Amélie," said he, "to meet your frank downrightness of mind, your love of what is unconventional, and unexpected, and literally true.

And yet, you know, the Constantinople of the chromo-lithographer must exist somewhere."

"In his own imagination," she replied, promptly. "In his own depraved imagination. It is his idea of what is beautiful. It is not what he sees, or has ever seen: it is what he thinks ought to be. And he goes about scattering his poison where it works most mischief—in the homes of the untravelled and uneducated."

"Why should not the poor man have his ideal of earthly beauty, like any one else?" said Paul Hitrovo, calmly smiling.

"I would set him to sweep the streets!" she cried, savagely. But the next instant she had grown conscious of her vehemence; she laughed a little as her eyes met those of the young Russian; and she said, with some faint touch of colour in the pale, satin-smooth cheek: "Yes, let him have his ideal. I suppose a good many of us worship some kind or another of false idol, without knowing it."

However, this thunder-squall soon blew over; the morning cleared up; and by-and-by the Orotanians had all gone ashore and dispersed their several ways—some to walk with slippered feet across the loose mattings of Sta. Sofia, others to purchase embroideries and Rhodian plates in the bazaars, others to call on friends away up in the fashionable quarters of Pera. And if two of us had a less simple duty to undertake—that, namely, of getting some information which might remove certain misgivings from the mind of an anxious mother—it needs only to be stated here that on this first day we were entirely unsuccessful. Of course it was a task that demanded a good deal of tact and delicacy: there could be no direct questioning, no bawling aloud in the market-place. And after all—as Wolfenberg was eager to point out—there was a kind of negative satisfaction to be drawn from the fact that, so far, nothing had been alleged in the remotest way against

the young Russian. His family were of good repute: if this particular member of it had made himself unhappily conspicuous, the fact was likely to have been remembered.

"I should almost be inclined to give Mrs. Dumaresq the assurances she wants," said he, towards the end of the day. "I don't think she can have anything to fear. The family seem to be well-known. And—and there is certainly nothing about the young man himself that would awake suspicion. Certainly not. His manner—his appearance—everything is in his favour. Besides that, Amélie herself is just about as good a judge of character as most. She is shrewd—clear-headed—observant: other women might get bewildered, and drawn into a perilous position: I don't think she would. So far, no one has had anything to say against him. Why should Mrs. Dumaresq fear? He seems to me to have everything that can make a young man attractive—good looks—good manners—

and now there is this musical bond between the two of them——"

Not a word about himself: not a word about what he was freely ready to surrender—if she so wished it. We were on the landing-stage at Galata, waiting for the tender to come back from the ship. And perhaps he did not observe much of what was now around and before him?—the approach of evening—Constantinople become more like the Constantinople of pictures—the rounded domes and slender minarets of Stamboul growing dark against the splendour of the west—while away over in Scutari, from amidst the black cypress-groves, a high window here and there shot back a shaft of blinding flame. He may have seen, or may not. His eyes were absent: perhaps he was looking at other places—and at other and future years. In any case, an incident now occurred that broke in upon his reverie in a sufficiently startling manner.

For in the morning the Dumaresqs had

declared their intention of remaining on board during the first day; and Hitrovo had also decided to stay with them. But here, as we were loitering about this stone quay, there drove up a carriage into the open space behind us; and, turning, we found that it was the Dumaresqs and their Russian friend who had just arrived. What had induced them to change their mind? They did not carry parcels, like the Orotanians who had been to the bazaars; though Amélie Dumaresq had some flowers in her hand. Well, it was of little moment: only that this was the first time they had gone on shore without Wolfenberg's escort. And that of itself might have seemed significant, but what now happened drove speculation and reflection out of every one's head.

"You here, Ernest?" said the young lady, coming forward in her frank and free fashion. "Have you had enough of Constantinople for one day?—aren't those mangy dogs too awful

for anything—and the odours of the streets! But at least the Turks are a handsomer race than the Greeks—did you ever see a more despicable-looking lot than the Greeks of Athens?—about as bad as the French of Algiers. Don't you think so? But—but when are they going to send ashore for us?" she added impatiently.

"The tender will be back directly—we just missed it," said he.

"Oh, never mind the tender!" she exclaimed. "We shall be late for dinner—here—let us go out in this boat."

There was a caïque within a couple of yards of her: the swarthy boatman slowly backing down the stern, and mutely appealing to be hired. Now the ordinary light caïque is the most unstable boat in existence; unless you step at once right down into the middle of the frail craft, over you go. And this girl, in her light-hearted ignorance, and before any one could warn her, must needs go forward, and

proceed to jump into the boat by placing one foot on the gunwale.

"Come along, mamma!" she cried at the same moment, counting on all being well.

But the gunwale simply went away from her. She threw up her arms to save her balance—scattering her bouquet; then somehow she seemed to fall backwards; there was a piercing shriek from her mother; and in a second every one was at the edge of the water—and Hitrovo in it! He had slipped over, and got hold of her almost before she had time to sink. With one hand he made a grasp at the side of the caïque; but that was of no use—though the boatman sprang aft to help; then he turned to the stone ledge of the quay, where there was abundant aid to haul him out along with his limp charge; and the next moment they were standing there, dripping, breathless, and laughing, in a most sorry and ludicrous plight, and yet with one of them perhaps secretly

exultant that a heroic rescue had been effected on such easy terms. The mamma alone was excited—near to hysterics: Amélie, on the other hand, as she shook her wet sleeves and skirts, was obviously and horribly ashamed.

"I will *not* wait for the steam-launch!" she exclaimed, half laughing and half in a temper. "Some one must hold this wretched boat until we all get in, and then we will sneak out to the ship, and steal up on board when nobody is looking. Call that a boat! It's all very fine to write verses about the caïque—and Leila's cheek—Leila had plenty of cheek if she wanted any one to go with her in a boat like that——"

"My precious darling!" cried the poor mother, pathetically busy with a feeble and ineffectual handkerchief. "You will get your death—and—and you must not try that boat again—the steam-launch or the tender must be here directly."

"I will not wait for either tender or steam-

launch," she said, imperiously, and yet with a profession of good-humour. "Come, Ernest; come, Mr. Hitrovo; you must hold the boat steady until mamma and I get in; and then we will go out and hang about the foot of the accommodation-ladder until we can sneak on board without being seen. A bath in the Bosphorus—whew, but it begins to be cold—it's perfectly dreadful down my back."

So that was the end of this adventure, for the time being. But although such secresy as was possible was practised on getting on board (most of the people, indeed, were now below, preparing for dinner), the story soon made its way through the ship; and so far from there being any laughter over a ludicrous incident, it seemed to lend a new and quite sentimental interest to the two figures that later on in the evening might have been seen at the piano, the one seated, the other standing with his violin at his shoulder, while together they played a

Fantasia on 'Carmen,' which they had found in some amiable person's portfolio.

Next morning found our impetuous Sappho in a whirlwind of eager anticipation; for there were to be great festivities in the town—a procession of the Sultan to the Mosque—a grand review of troops—and what not. 'Tambourgi! Tambourgi!' we heard her exclaiming; and that sounded alarmingly like an echo of the Major's muttered ejaculations; but we discovered it was only a quotation from her favourite Byron, for she went on with:—

'Chimariot, Illyrian, and dark Suliote!'

The Major, by the way, came presently to us in a state of furious indignation.

"Of all the impudent creatures that ever breathed!" he said, in incoherent wrath, and with his turkey-cock face ablaze. "Absolutely shameless! Won't take the plainest hint!——"

"But who?—who?" one has to ask of him.

"Why, that madwoman—that poetess—that idiot — that frowsy, ugly, ill-dressed, elderly frump! She comes and tacks herself on to Lady Cameron—must join our party—the dear Major's military knowledge—quite playful and flattering, the antiquated old giggler! And her pug; oh, yes, she must bring that blessed beast too—she'll carry it all the time—not in anybody's way. Gad, I wish that growling little brute would bite me! I do honestly—actually and fairly bite me; for I'd snatch it out of her very arms, if she was shrieking like the Witch of Endor, and overboard the hideous little wretch would go the very next second—"

"Poor Phaon! But if she leads him by a string through the streets of Constantinople—those other dogs lying about the pavements—mightn't there be a chance of a scrimmage?"

A new light seemed to dawn on the

Major: he laughed a ferocious, an unholy laugh.

"He'd get chawed up in an instant!—eh, eh? By Jove, that'll be worth seeing! I'll go and tell the madwoman we particularly want her to bring the little beast with her, and she needn't take the trouble to carry him—oh, no!—leading him by a string will be quite sufficient. What a grand idea!" And forthwith he turned away, with these base and treacherous designs in his brain.

Then we saw them leave for the shore, the Major wearing an air of importance, being in charge of all those women-folk. The Dumaresqs were also going to see the Imperial procession, the young Russian accompanying them. Mrs. Dumaresq, it is true, seemed a little concerned that Wolfenberg was remaining behind, and expressed some timid remonstrance; but he made sufficient excuse; and, indeed, the poor lady was in the habit of leaving all arrangements in her daughter's hands.

"You may be sure of this, mamma," Amélie Dumaresq remarked, as she shook loose her dust-cloak and fastened her gloves, "that Ernest has something better to do than stare at squadrons of Turkish cavalry. Leave him to himself: the world will be the gainer. Come along: the tender is waiting." And thereupon she led the way down the accommodation-ladder, and stepped on board, and took her place among the other Orotanians. She looked up, and waved a little good-bye to Wolfenberg: he raised his cap, and then turned away. Perhaps he was growing accustomed to seeing his guardianship of those two being gradually transferred into other hands.

On this second mission of inquiry we were more fortunate—singularly fortunate, indeed, inasmuch as the information we sought was volunteered to us, and that in a curiously accidental way. It should be said, however, that a list of the passengers by the *Orotania*

had appeared in the *Levant Herald* of that morning; so that any one whom we might chance to meet, either at the Embassy or elsewhere, was sure to know who our companions were.

"Hitrovo? Paul Hitrovo? Yes, it must be the same. Lying quiet for a time. Best thing he could do."

This was the first hint; and a mere expression of ignorance on our part was all the further question that was needed.

"Don't you know the story? Oh, well, it was hushed up in a way; an awkward scandal; but when once names are mentioned, it is difficult to get them withdrawn or forgotten."

"A scandal?" said Wolfenberg, quickly. "But—but perhaps it was not very serious."

"Not as regards your shipmate; oh, no," was the light-hearted answer. "All that could be said against him was that he seems to have got into a very fast set—a sporting set—in Vienna—rather going the pace, I imagine.

But the particular scandal was bad enough; very awkward incident; cheating at cards; a quarrel; a duel there and then, ending in nothing; and a suicide the next morning. A very ugly story altogether; but they tried to get it hushed up, because a nephew of the Grand Duke —— was of the party."

"But it was not Hitrovo who was caught cheating?" Wolfenberg interposed again.

"No, no; but he was there; and altogether I am not surprised he considered it prudent to slip away for awhile and let things rest."

Wolfenberg looked immensely relieved.

"And that is all?" he demanded.

"It is all I ever heard of him. But you ought to have got to know him pretty well by this time on board ship?"

"Oh, yes, yes," Wolfenberg said, affecting a certain indifference. "Oh, yes, naturally We get to know a little about every one on board ship—sailing together—constant association—naturally, naturally." And he put

aside the *Levant Herald* and its list of passengers with a kind of careless air, as if the story that had been thus accidentally revealed was of little importance to him. But his eyes thereafter were thoughtful; and for some time he was silent—seated here at an open window, in the cool shade of an awning, high on the heights of Pera.

CHAPTER II.

"OATS-PEASE-BEANS."

NIGHT had fallen; but Constantinople was all a blaze and glory of illumination; and over the black waters of the harbour burned the riding-lights of the ships and steamers—innumerable golden points of fire in the dark. Here on deck there were but a few dusky figures, hardly distinguishable save when they chanced to pass the open skylight of the saloon. And if any one of them had had the curiosity to peer over and look below? Well, there was rather a pretty sight visible there: the slim young Russian seated at the piano, and Amélie Dumaresq standing by him, pleased, interested, and listening with all her

ears, as he began to play, in a slow and graceful fashion, Tschaïkowsky's *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt.* The odd thing was that the moment Mrs. Threepenny-bit, standing by the skylight, recognised the air of the Russian love-song, she looked startled for a moment, and then she said, somewhat hurriedly, to Wolfenberg, who was talking to her—

"Shall we go a little way along—towards the wheel? There will be less chance of interruption." And he followed her obediently, probably little guessing at the real reason for her sudden retreat.

He had come to ask her advice. Ought Mrs. Dumaresq to be informed of what we had heard about Paul Hitrovo? His own opinion was that she should not.

"There is nothing so very terrible about it," he said—and he seemed anxious that we should all of us think well of this young man whom Amélie Dumaresq had so markedly taken into her favour—"An unfortunate escapade—

something to be soon forgotten—and even if a young fellow has got into a fast set, well, it is easy for him to get out of it again. What is that?—no; I think the negative evidence is all to his advantage; and besides, haven't we plenty of opportunities of judging of himself from day to day? I don't see any definite reason why Mrs. Dumaresq should be anxious—should be at all anxious. Then, again, Amélie is one not easily blinded; she has clear perceptions; if she has been drawn to this young Russian, it must be on account of certain qualities that she recognises and appreciates——"

"Do you think so?" said the small woman, gently—indeed, she had never overcome her half-declared and probably quite unreasonable prejudice against M. Paul Hitrovo. "I have seen some strange instances of infatuation—some that did not last long either. And in this present case I would wait. I would not make matters too serious. Perhaps she is

merely amusing herself: girls often do on board ship—— "

"No, no," said he, distinctly. "That is not her character at all. She is too thorough for that. It is real—whatever it is—and however it may end." He was silent for a little while. Then he said: "I may have been wrong all the way through. There are mysteries in human nature that are difficult to read. Haven't I told you that with all her splendid vitality and enjoyment of life, her eager spirits, her resolute self-confidence, she has at times moods of profound despondency and almost despair? Have I never told you about her often sitting up till three and four in the morning, alone, and thinking? Well, I put that all down to the divine discontent of the artist—a constant seeking for that which cannot be found—a perpetual longing and restlessness—the creative faculty ever striving after some new thing. But I may have been mistaken. Perhaps it was that she felt her

artist life to be only a part of her woman's life; and not enough. Perhaps it was some sense of incompleteness — some unsatisfied yearnings and instincts not understood by herself—the woman stronger than the artist, and demanding emotions, and sympathies, and associations which art cannot give. I may not explain clearly: these are only vague speculations of mine. Perhaps I expected too much—counted on too much abnegation. After all, she is a woman; and 'contentment, like the speedwell, blows along the common beaten way.' Very well. So be it. Whatever promises to secure her happiness, that is the one thing; and my theories, and wishes, and hopes, connected with the artistic side of her life, must simply go to the wall—and welcome!"

He spoke so equably and firmly and dispassionately: it was as if he would have us believe that the possible change in Amélie Dumaresq's whole programme of existence

could not affect him in any way whatsoever. But perhaps the woman to whom he was now talking could form her own guesses as to the slow agony of sleepless hours through which he had won to this forced and outward calm of renunciation. And she may have suspected that those tragic hours—solitary, dreaded, full of unspoken farewells to the cherished dreams and plans of years—were not yet done with, or likely to be done with. His tone was firm and strong and resolute; there was nothing but kindliness and thoughtfulness with regard to the girl herself; there was no mention of any interests or projects of his own: but he could not altogether deceive. This present companion and confidante of his had at times caught a look in his face, in his eyes, when he happened to glance towards Amélie Dumaresq and her new friend, that spoke of many things.

And on the very next morning she showed in a practical manner her understanding of

the situation and her sincere and active sympathy. This, by the way, was an extremely brisk and lively morning; the ship in general commotion; and Miss Penguin, our fiery poetess, the heroine of the hour. For it appeared that, on the previous day, when she and the other Orotanians were witnessing the procession of the Sultan on his way to the mosque, she had become enthusiastic over the splendid military spectacle, and had even developed some sudden impulse of loyalty towards the Commander of the Faithful himself; insomuch that when he drew near, greeted by the mournful howls of the soldiers, she called aloud to her companions:

"Three cheers from the Orotanians for His Imperial Majesty the Sultan!"

It was Peggy who told us this story. She said that the instant His Majesty heard the unusual sound—the ringing English cheer—he at once turned and looked, and smiled, and made the little dabs that form the

Turkish salute. Nor was that all that came from Sappho's impulsive intervention. The Sultan, as it turned out, proceeded to make inquiries as to who the strangers were; and in the evening he was graciously pleased to send one of his aides-de-camp to invite them to inspect on the following day the treasures of the Seraglio, and also to visit the twin Palaces on the Bosphorus, the Asiatic Beyler Bey and the European Dolma Baghcha. And thus it was that on this busy morning we found a whole procession of the Imperial caiques coming out to the *Orotania* to carry away these favoured folk. Very picturesque looked the long and slender and graceful boats: eight or ten rowers in each, with sun-tanned faces, snow-white costumes, and red fez; the oars, between the gunwale and the hand, puffed out for balance, like the cork butt of a fishing-rod indefinitely magnified. And, of course, the women were all eagerness to get away; there were wonderful tales of

the bejewelled cups and vessels out of which they would take their coffee and sip jelly compounded of rose-leaves; there were still more marvellous stories of collections of precious stones that would cause all eyes to wonder. Sappho was particularly energetic: nay, had she not earned the right to exercise a little authority, seeing that all this had come about through her means? She entertained the handsome Aide-de-camp with much sprightly conversation, in quite sufficiently fluent French. She hinted to the Captain that he might ask that most courteous emissory and officer to dinner. She went to the Purser and begged him to get the bandmaster to play the Turkish national air on the arrival of our guest or guests. And when she went down the accommodation-ladder, it was —— Bey himself who handed her into the first of the caiques; and we felt that Sappho had merited the honour, in spite of her pernicious rhymes.

Meanwhile, what of the others? Well, on this occasion there was no need to make up very definite parties; for this was to be a water-excursion, first to the Serai over in Stamboul, and then along to the Bosphorus; it was only when the hiring of the carriages had to be contemplated that we arranged who was to go ashore with whom. The Major, of course, was in dutiful attendance on Lady Cameron; and young Julian Verrinder, more modestly and shyly, hovered about the Juno-eyed maiden, who seemed afraid almost to look at him, such being her guilty consciousness of mind. Mrs. Dumaresq, at the last moment, seemed inclined to draw back; but she was instantly overruled by her daughter.

"Why, mamma, you know there is nothing in the world interests you so much as jewels!" she exclaimed. "And just listen to what Mr. Hitrovo says about the pearls and emeralds—two soldiers guarding a single stone! And

who knows but that I might get some new idea, some Eastern idea, for the setting of my diamonds? I must have them re-set. I am quite dissatisfied."

"My dear child!" the mother said, in a frightened whisper. "How can you be so indiscreet! It was mad enough of you to bring them with you, but to talk of them, with all these strangers hanging around—"

"At all events you're going ashore with us," the imperious young lady said, paying little heed to this admonition. "I would not miss seeing the Dolma Baghcha for worlds—it must be a perfect dream of Eastern luxury. Mr. Hitrovo, will you give mamma your hand?—"

We were the last little group at the top of the accommodation-ladder; certain of us looking forward not so much to palaces and gems and rose-leaf jelly as to the novel experience of gliding along in those graceful caiques. But at this moment Miss Dumaresq stopped.

"Where is Ernest?" said she to her

mother. "I don't see him in any of the boats. Isn't he going with us?"

Well, we had not missed him either; but on turning towards the deserted ship, there was no difficulty in making him out; his was the solitary figure slowly pacing up and down by the wheel-box, and directing an occasional glance towards the now departing caiques. Amélie Dumaresq hesitated for a second. It would take some time to go and remonstrate with him, and persuade him; whereas those people below were waiting for her. She seemed annoyed and impatient; but at last she said—

"Oh, I suppose he wants to remain on board!" And therewith she went on down the accommodation-ladder.

Not so the small woman in whose ear Ernest Wolfenberg had been pouring his confidences on the previous evening.

"I will not leave him alone like that—it is too shameful!" she said, under her breath.

And she turned to the third officer: "No, thank you, I don't think I shall go ashore—tell them not to wait."

There was another person adjacent who was only too glad to escape a dose of sight-seeing, and who welcomed the prospect of a quiet day on board with an exceeding joy. We should have the whole ship to ourselves; we should lunch with the officers; we should hear of many experiences in far lands—some of them, perhaps, approximating to the truth. And if the solitary man down there by the wheel chose to remain all day by himself, that also was at his goodwill and pleasure. But our Mrs. Threepenny-bit had imagined aright; hardly had the last caique left the vessel's side when he came along and joined us.

"Not going ashore?" he said lightly. "Not at the invitation of the Sultan? Oh, you really ought to have gone: it isn't every one who is shown the treasures of the Seraglio Palace; a great honour, as I understand."

Then he seemed to think that some explanation was necessary of his own conduct in separating himself from his friends. "As for me—well—you see, the Dumaresqs and I have travelled a good deal together—and—naturally they are glad to have fresher and livelier society—something new—the companionship of an old fogey like myself cannot be very entertaining."

"Ah, but you must not talk like that!" said she, warmly. "I know how Mrs. Dumaresq speaks of your constant kindness and your care of them; she is most grateful to you, and no wonder; and Amélie——"

There was the slightest quiver of his eyelids; but he did not raise his eyes.

"Amélie also," continues this small woman; "do you think she does not understand what she owes to your friendship? As for going ashore—why, she was looking everywhere for you—she was asking for you the very last thing before she left the ship."

"Well," said he, "since we are together again, and by ourselves, shall we return to those dark mysteries of existence that we left unexplored last night?"

He spoke smilingly; but that smile soon died away from his face; and his eyes looked rather tired and worn, and hopeless. Perhaps he fancied we might notice something of this in his appearance.

"I could not sleep well last night," he said; "and so I got up and walked about the deck. And I did not go back to my cabin. The sunrise was wonderful—the pale light behind the domes and spires—it was like a dream—something distant—something centuries remote, and unreal, like an Eastern story. And I had plenty of time for going over that problem again. Those quiet hours bring counsel. And it seemed to me that Amélie Dumaresq might fairly say to any onlooker—to any one a little bit concerned about her future—she might fairly say, 'The world

has many artists; while I have but the one world and the one life to live in it.'"

We could surmise what had brought him up on deck for that lonely pacing to and fro, even before the blue-grey dawn had risen clear and trembling behind the tall minarets.

"If you have an artistic gift," he went on, in a kind of absent way—but we knew how nearly these apparently abstract speculations touched the one person in whom he was so deeply interested—"even a great artistic gift—what is the obligation under which you lie of exercising it? Why should you be bound to exercise it? Take the case of a woman: which is her higher duty—the living fully and completely her own life, or the cultivation of what artistic faculty she happens to possess?"

"Could not both go together?" was the timid suggestion.

He shook his head.

"'The reed that grows never more again,

As a reed with the reeds in the river.' Art is inexorably exacting. And I don't myself see where the duty or obligation lies. If a woman perceives that the complete fulfilment of her life involves love and marriage and maternity, is not that the higher duty that she owes to herself, and owes to the world, as one might say, as well as to herself?—"

"Mr. Wolfenberg," said this confidante of his, who has a rare courage when it is demanded of her, "may I speak frankly? You are simply inventing a lot of desperate excuses for what you fear Amélie Dumaresq is going to do; you want that to appear natural and inevitable and right; and you won't have it that she has caused you or any one disappointment by throwing over her ambition as an artist. You are bent on defending her whatever she does. But some one might reply to you: 'The world has plenty of wives and mothers: it is Amélie Dumaresq's duty to cultivate the exceptional

gift she possesses'—and it is you yourself who have told us how exceptional that gift is."

His pale and thoughtful face flushed a little —though the home-thrust was not meant in any unkindly way. And indeed she went on to give him such comfort as her sufficiently nimble brain could evolve from the situation.

"I want you to remember this," she said, "that she has not yet definitely abandoned her artistic career, or taken up with any other. You are simply so devoted to her that you want to justify her beforehand, in view of any possibility. But is it likely she should all at once resolve to give up her painting, merely because of her making a new friend ? Oh, no ; surely not ; but then, on the other hand, she is very much attracted by whatever interests her at the moment ; and this new acquaintance amuses her, makes her curious, perhaps even tantalises her through his indifference of manner : she is like a child

with a new toy, incapable of thinking of anything else—"

But again he shook his head.

"Her nature is stronger and deeper than all that," said he. "She is at once tenacious and firm; no fear of consequences will deter her."

"A breath of cold wind sometimes awakens people who have been only partially mesmerised."

For a second he looked at her. But he had not the courage to ask her whence might come any such revivifying draught. Was she hinting at that most perilous of all things—intervention and remonstrance and warning?

Yet who could have imagined there were any haunting problems of existence, or cruel searchings of heart, or indeed anything of care, or trouble, or perplexity, in any way connected with this radiant young creature when she came back in the afternoon, arriving at the head of the companion-ladder breath-

less, laughing, excited, pleased with herself and pleased with everybody, and altogether charmed and delighted with her experiences of the day? Nay, in her waywardness and gaiety she chose to be petulant with her Russian friend; told him that she had heard from one of the Turkish officers the true story about Plevna; and declared her intention of standing up when the band should play the Turkish national air in honour of our guests. And when at length she went away to dress for dinner we conjectured that from her abundant store of diamonds—of which we had vaguely heard—it was the crescent ornament she would choose on this particular evening to shine in her raven-black hair.

This was our last night in Constantinople; and there was a little stir of expectation throughout the ship, for there were certain shore-acquaintances who were coming to dine with us and say good-bye. Those who were on deck beheld the lofty domes and speared

minarets grow gradually darker and darker against the splendour of the dying day; a crescent moon of clearest silver hung high in the violet heavens; and as the twilight fell the twin red rays of the lighthouse that is known as Leander's Tower, over yonder at Scutari, burned strong through the dusk. It was during this interval of waiting (while the musicians, grouped round the newly-lit lamp, were playing a slow and sinuous-moving waltz) that our Peggy appeared, queen-like as of old. Yet she did not have her customary air of high and confident good-humour.

"Missis," said she, in an undertone, "I am glad Mr. Wolfenberg did not go with us to the Palaces to-day."

"What now, then?" said her friend.

"Well, I think that girl shows her partiality for her Russian acquaintance just a little too openly. She has eyes and ears for no one else."

"Peggy," said the other, rather sadly,

"can't you understand why Wolfenberg remained on board this ship to-day? He has nerved himself to face what he fears is inevitable in the future: what he cannot bring himself to face is the intermediate steps—the gradual process going on meanwhile. It is too much to ask of him. She is being taken away from him, and from all that they have planned together; you cannot expect him to look on as an unconcerned spectator. It must be torture to him: why should he not avoid it? I have been trying to reassure him as well as I could; and of course it is quite possible she may get cured of this infatuation; but in the mean time I can believe that, however he may conceal it, it is just tearing his heart in two to see her devoting herself to this man—"

"And yet you say Wolfenberg is not in love with her!" Peggy exclaimed. "Why, what is that but the maddened jealousy of a lover, a hopeless lover—what else is it?"

"I do not know—the whole thing is too terrible," replied her friend, with a sigh. And that was all she could say just then; for here were our guests arriving at the gangway, while at the same moment the tinkle of the steward's bell began to sound through the ship: so curiously are tragic things and trivial commingled in this bewildering phantasmagoria of a world.

Next morning found us entering the Black Sea; and for a while it seemed as if we were about to get a bit of a dusting before it was done with us. There was a stiff breeze blowing, with heavy squalls of rain; the long roll of the lurid waves was broken everywhere into whirling crests of white; the wind kept freshening up; and the *Orotania* plunged and swung and laboured in a most unaccustomed fashion. To our modern Argonauts adventuring into the mysterious Euxine, it might have appeared that these unknown waters, dreaded of old, meant to keep up their ancient

and evil reputation for cold and mists and storms. But the good fortune that had befriended us so far followed us hither also; as the day wore on, the bursts of sunlight became more frequent; the leaden-grey sea changed to a vivid blue-black, opaque and heavy with colour; while the sky over-arching that breadth of deepest indigo was clearing to a summer-like fineness, with flying shreds of cloud, palely opalescent, that the fierce sunlight seemed to be gradually eating up. It was quite a joyous thing this buffeting about, after the protracted spells of calm, so long as the inevitable promenade on deck did not precipitate you into somebody's lap. And the swift-rushing, dead-blue waves, with their tossing crests torn into spindrift, were a welcome sight, and might have been even a noble and inspiring sight, but that our image-destroyer was again to the fore, apparently determined we should not have a single illusion left.

" Why, what rubbish it is," exclaimed Miss Dumaresq, in her cruelly downright fashion, " for people to talk about the great spaces of the sea—the immensity of the view—and poetical exaggerations of that kind! There is no immensity of view at all. On land there is, especially in a hilly country; at sea there is nothing of the kind. How far is it over to the horizon there? Not more than ten or a dozen miles, I suppose! But you can see fifty or sixty miles on land, when the hills are high enough—"

" Amélie," said Wolfenberg, " I fancy I have heard that you can see the Peak of Teneriffe, from the deck of a vessel, some hundred or hundred and twenty miles away——"

" Yes, because that is the land!" she insisted. " Of the ocean itself you can never see but a little bit—a little circle—a mere round gridiron."

She had her contention, of course. For one

thing, Wolfenberg never contradicted her, or argued with her; he would merely throw out a little tentative suggestion now and again, to see if it appealed to her. But what especially struck us—all through this brilliant, tumbling, and tossing day—and while the west flamed dusky red in the evening, with the promenaders on deck grown almost black—and as the night came suddenly upon us, with the young moon sailing through the violet heavens and sending golden-white reflections splintering across the waves—what especially struck us was that this resumed life on board ship seemed to have brought back Amélie Dumaresq to her old allegiance. Perhaps she had become conscious that during those days in Constantinople she had too obviously forsaken and neglected old friends for new; perhaps she had had time to reflect on Wolfenberg's being left alone, and had grown a little remorseful. At all events, she appeared determined there should be no more

of those isolated reveries now; she entirely devoted herself to him; she was most affectionate. And it must be said that the Russian did not seek to interfere; nay, she was not one to brook interference; she was imperious in her ways; if she wished to have such and such arrangements made, they had to be made. And how easy it was for her to show her old companion favour! She called him 'Ernest:' there was no other man on board this ship whom she named by his Christian name. Wolfenberg seemed inclined to laugh a little at her, so serious was she, and assiduous; and yet perhaps it was pleasant to be petted and made much of by this charming and winning and brilliant creature, whose long-lashed, lustrous dark eyes beamed, whose red lips smiled to show pearly teeth, whose finger tips had a touch that thrilled. It was like old times for all of us: it was like the beginning of the voyage: we remembered the foreign-looking fascinating

girl with the pale olive face and the magnificent black hair who had attracted every one's notice on the very first evening, and who had thereafter puzzled us not a little with her alternations of wilful self-assertion and childish playfulness. How long was it since she had taunted Ernest Wolfenberg with being Mr. Gloomy-Brows? How long was it since she had sat down to the piano—laughing—to tease him with her Spanish song:—

'Out of reach and sight of man
I will keep me (if I can!),
For I'm but a little maid,
And of love I'm so afraid!'

But this was not her mood to-night, when we were once more assembled in the saloon for dinner. Oh, no; now she was all anticipation about once more getting to work; she had found her subject—if he approved; she hoped she might be able to make of it something that would win from him at least a glance of commendation. As for the

exhibitions?—she cared nothing for the exhibitions. As for the critics or the public?—she cared for neither the critics nor the public. It was for one whom she knew to be a true artist to say whether she had done well or ill: if ill, then there would be the fire handy—and oblivion—and a resolve to try for something better.

"And the subject, Amélie?" he said.

"'*Oats-pease-beans,*'" she answered.

"I beg your pardon?" interposed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, doubtfully—she being not very learned in folk-lore.

"Ah, perhaps that is not the English name; that is our American name," she explained. "It is a children's game—a kind of dance—a number of little girls joining hands in a ring—and they have a rhyme that they sing as they go round—

> '*You and I and nobody knows*
> *Where oats-pease-beans and barley grows.*'"

"Oh, how very quaint!" exclaimed the

elder woman, with evident interest. "And of course you will put them in a pretty meadow, in the spring-time, and they will be wearing chains of daisies and butter-cups."

Now was there ever in the world a worse shot made! That any one who had seen any of Amélie Dumaresq's work, or even known herself and heard her talk, should have formed such a futile forecast seemed incredible; but we are not all of us wise at all moments.

"Oh, no, I mean to put them in Greenwich Street," the young lady replied promptly; and then, seeing that this did not much enlighten us, she proceeded to explain still further. "Perhaps you are not very familiar with the business part of New York city? Well, neither am I; but I know enough of it for my present purpose. For I should take this little group of children—squalid little brats that had wandered out of the slums—and I should make them play 'Oats-pease-

beans' on the side-walk in Greenwich Street at the very busiest hour of the day; and the subject of the picture would really be the different expressions of the various business men coming on this interruption of the traffic —with the absolute unconsciousness of the children, of course. Then look at the studies of character that might be brought in. There would be the hurrying man impatient and angry, scowling and almost ready to box their ears; there would be the more human creature, stopping for a moment to look, and smiling—perhaps slipping his hand into his pocket for a stray quarter, though I don't know how I could paint *that;* there might be the entirely engrossed man, not seeing anything, but only vaguely aware of some obstruction and trying to avoid it; oh, there would be no end to the studies in human nature that you could bring in! And then, in the middle of all this commercial whirl and tumult, and in the middle of all those grown-

up tempers and scowls, the small wretches, quite oblivious, prancing around with their

> '*You and I and nobody knows*
> *Where oats-pease-beans and barley grows.*'

I think that will be quite as idyllic as putting them in a meadow with young lambs and buttercups."

"And I think so too," said Mrs. Three-penny-bit, with decision: she might have known that Amélie Dumaresq was not likely to paint any pretty, conventional landscape.

"Well, Ernest," said the young lady, cheerfully, "what do you think—will it do?"

"If you *see* your subject in it, that is enough," he made answer. And then he said, with a smile: "It will be a test of your experience of human life, Amélie, quite apart from its pictorial qualities. What proportion of the grown-ups are you going to make ill-tempered and scowling?"

"Oh, I can't have it sentimental," she exclaimed at once. "No, I must have it true.

And I won't go much by my own experience; only I imagine that nine men out of ten—or shall we say nineteen out of twenty?—if they were suddenly brought up by such an obstruction, would say something very like what the Major sometimes says when he fancies no one can hear. What do you think?—do I judge too ill of my fellow-creatures? Well, I don't care, if it will make my picture the stronger. In fact, I think I will have the whole of those men angry and scowling and impatient—the whole lot of them—all of them, except one; and that solitary bystander must come in to strike the note of kindliness and human sympathy." She hesitated; looked at him with laughing and yet timid eyes; and then said, with a pretty confusion: "Ernest, you must be my model for that single bystander."

So that was all that we heard at this time about the *Oats-pease-beans* project; but naturally, taken in conjunction with her marked

change of manner towards her old friend, it was not likely to be forgotten. On this very evening, when our women-folk had got into their snug retreat aft of the wheel-box (the wonder-world of the stars was all brilliant now, and there were glow-worm lights twinkling for a moment hither and thither on the tumultuous blue-black waves) Peggy at once said :

"Well, now, Missis, what do you say to that? If she talks about returning to America, and getting on with her work, she can have no thought of marrying and settling down in Europe?"

"I rather distrust such very sudden conversions," was the answer. "And yet who knows?—she may be fighting against what she feels to be before her—trying to cling to old companions and old ways. It is all a mystery to me. Only I wish Wolfenberg were out of it: I wish he had never come on board this ship."

CHAPTER III.

UNWELCOME GUESTS.

EARLY morning. A young man appears on deck—a young man of modest and prepossessing mien, with the least little bit of a light yellow moustache, just sufficient for finger and thumb in moments of nervousness. He comes forward shyly and timidly.

"Would you like to—to look at some verses?" he says. "Emily thought perhaps they might amuse you. She's awfully obliged to you, you know, for having made things easy for both of us; and Lady Cameron has been so kind, owing to your intervention. These are mere nonsense-verses, of course; but still—well, there is no harm in them;

but Miss Penguin is rather trying at times, you know."

And so this bashful youth produces a half-sheet of paper with the following lines scrawled on it in a girlish handwriting :—

I'm sick of Romans, Greeks, and Turks ;
I'm sick of Homer and all his works ;
I'm sicker still, I do declare,
Of Sappho and her Lempriere.

Pursue me over land and sea ;
Embalm me in Arsinoë ;
So I escape the awful scare
Of Sappho and her Lempriere.

I'd dwell in Zante's stifling heat ;
I'd even drink the wines of Crete ;
So I got safely anywhere
From Sappho and from Lempriere.

Drown me by Chios' sounding shore,
Or where Corcyra's surges roar :
Sweet Death, release me from despair
Of Sappho and her Lempriere.

Blow, Æolus, your fiercest blast !
Jove, send your red bolts hurtling fast !
Neptune, down to your oozy lair
Drag Sappho and drag Lempriere !

Well, this is a sufficiently astonishing docu-

ment. What has our cataclysmal and beloved Sappho done that she should be attacked in this gratuitous fashion?

"Most disgraceful! Who is the author of these scandalous verses?"

"I think one of the Smeeton girls—or both of them; but they're keeping it a profound secret," he says.

"No wonder. They ought to be ashamed of themselves. Have they no respect for age, and for the fire of genius, and the whirlwind force of tempestuous passion? Here, take the rubbish away. But wait a moment. You spoke of Lady Cameron. Would you like to find an easy way of propitiating her this morning?"

"Certainly—certainly," he says, with unmistakable eagerness.

"Do you know where we are, then?"

"I heard somebody say something about Cape Chersonese."

"That land over there is the coast of the

Crimea. We are going on towards Kalamita Bay; and by-and-by we shall be opposite the Heights of Alma. Now are you aware that the Battle of the Alma was won by the 79th Regiment, the Cameron Highlanders?"

"Oh, was it?" he asks, suspiciously.

"You can say so. Indeed, you'd better whip down now into the saloon, before anybody is about, and secure Kinglake's 'Crimea' out of the library, and read up all about Colin Campbell and his Highland Brigade—but especially about the 79th Regiment. You will see how the Russians must have thought the earth was bearing giants when they beheld the Cameron Highlanders appear on the top of the hill, with their tall plumes waving; and you will see how the 79th advanced against the Sousdal Column, and 'caught the mass in its sin—caught it daring to march across the face of a Highland battalion—'"

"Yes, yes," he says, quickly and gratefully; and he is just about to depart on this quest

for invaluable information when, lo and behold! here comes Lady Cameron herself; she is always one of the early ones.

"Good morning!" she says, pleasantly, to the young man.

"Good morning!" he answers, with a certain hesitation, for apparently he is undecided as to whether even now he should seek safety and knowledge in the saloon. But then he might miss his opportunity altogether? "This must be a most interesting country for you to visit, Lady Cameron," he ventures to say. "I—I suppose you would like to land at the Alma, and inspect the battlefield—the battlefield where the Cameronians appeared on the top of the hill—"

"The Cameronians were a religious sect, Mr. Verrinder," she says, with a gentle smile.

"Oh, yes, of course," he says, hastily. "I mean the Cameron Highlanders—the famous 79th, of course—when they—when they rushed forward to support Soulsby's column—and—

swept the Russians from the field. It must have been a proud day for your husband, Lady Cameron—to be at the head of such a fine body of men—"

At this she stares curiously.

"Mr. Verrinder," she says, "do you think my husband is old enough to have commanded a regiment at the Battle of the Alma?"

"Oh, no, no!" he exclaims, in dire confusion. "I meant—that is—every one knows the history of the battle—and the splendid part played by the Cameronian Highlanders—"

"But if I had been there on that day," she says, turning to another bystander, and good-naturedly pretending not to notice the young man's desperate blushing and embarrassment, "I think I could have helped. Yes, indeed. Do you remember that after the battle Sir Colin Campbell announced to the Highland Brigade that he meant to ask the Commander-in-Chief for permission to wear the Highland bonnet during the rest of the campaign?—and

they could get nobody to make up the heckle of the bonnet until a young lieutenant of the Black Watch undertook it? I should like to have put a stitch or two in that bonnet; I just hate to think it was a man who had the making up of the red and white heckle that was to represent the whole brigade. Of course you know what happened two days after, when the parade took place, and when Sir Colin rode up, wearing the Highland plumes?—there was such a cheering that both the French and English armies were startled. It was a handsome compliment he paid to those three regiments; but they had well deserved it. You remember what he said to them before they went into action? 'Now, men, the army will watch us. Make me proud of my Highland Brigade.' And I think they did so."

And thus it was, in this easy and unconcerned fashion, she continued chatting, in order to cover the hapless youth's confused retreat into silence. It was considerate of her;

but Peggy always is considerate, and generous, and kind: at this moment one thought it wiser to conceal from her those ribald verses about our dear Sappho—the probability is that she would have been hotly indignant.

Indeed, some little consideration and tact was demanded all round on this particular morning; for we had to remember that one of our fellow-passengers was a Russian. When Paul Hitrovo came on deck, we affected to regard those Crimean shores with indifference; and in point of fact the pale yellow coast-line we beheld beyond the heavily blue-black and swift-glancing sea was not very impressive. We steamed on until we were opposite the heights of Alma; but no one volunteered to give us information regarding the whereabouts of the battle. There seemed to be a disposition abroad to say, "Well, it happened so long ago, let's hope it isn't true." Amélie Dumaresq was the only one who would not join in this conspiracy of silence; not at all; compromise

was not in her nature; she was openly denouncing the Crimean campaign as the most outrageously uncalled-for war that even a British Government had ever blundered—or slumbered—into; and she went on to say to her companion, who was no other than Hitrovo himself—

"I shouldn't at all wonder if the authorities at Sebastopol objected to our landing. How can they like it? It seems almost impertinent. The war is too recent; it isn't like the Battle of Hastings. And we shall be driving about looking at the ruined fortifications—"

"Oh, no, do not think that," said he, with a smile. "They cannot be so sensitive. And the fortifications are all rebuilt. Besides, this is not an English party exclusively: you, for example, you cannot have come to triumph. No; but what is more likely is this: my country is much given over to officialism, I admit it. You may have difficulty in getting ashore at Sevastopol——"

"Sevasto'pol?" she interrupted. "Is that how you pronounce it?"

"Have I been so fortunate as to convey a little information?" he said. "Yes, there is a good deal of officialism; each man wishes to make himself secure—to have authority for what he does: most likely they will telegraph to St. Petersburg for instructions. Sevastopol has always been jealously guarded—difficult for a stranger to get into; it was always so; and recently there has been a proposal to shut out all foreign vessels, keeping the great arsenal a great arsenal and nothing more. Well, perhaps we shall be allowed to land, perhaps not——"

"But you," said she, boldly, "why shouldn't you go ashore with the Purser, and make explanations, when he goes for pratique?"

"I?" said he, laughing. "I am nobody. The smallest official in such a place is a more important personage than I. It is true, I

speak the language; and when the soldiers come on board—when the sentries are posted—I can give them a hint not to be too inquisitive about the ladies' cabins——"

"Soldiers?" said she. "Is the ship to be put under a guard of soldiers?"

"I think it is most likely," said he. "And then still further—well, you must not be too incensed, Miss Dumaresq; you come from a country where there is much personal liberty—little interference; but different nations have different customs—"

"What is it now?" she demanded, in her blunt way.

"Perhaps they will not insist," he said, regarding her with a little caution; "but if there should have to be a parade on deck——"

"Of the passengers?"

"Yes—it is the health regulations——"

"I will not be paraded!" she said, angrily. "Inspected like a lot of pauper immigrants?

I will not! There must be an American Consul here—I will appeal to him—"

"If it is only a formality!" he said. "And a little good temper makes things go so easily."

"I will not be paraded on deck and inspected, as if I had just landed at Castle Garden," said she, very distinctly. "And they cannot compel me if I refuse." Then she suddenly changed her tone. "Well, I have no quarrel with Russia," she said. "If they want to make vexatious regulations because this is an English ship, it is hardly to be wondered at; only I will tell them that we Americans should be exempt. And, Mr. Hitrovo, we are going to rely on you. You must be our interpreter. It is your country; you are receiving us; you must give us a courteous welcome."

"If I had the government of your reception, there would be little doubt about that," said he; and by this time we had turned round,

and were steaming south again, towards Sebastopol and the far-receding and lofty and precipitous cliffs of the Chersonese.

Now, our preconceived idea of Sebastopol was of something large, and frowning, and lonely: towers and walls and batteries more or less in ruins, and all of a sombre hue—dark and half-forsaken in spite of recent reconstruction. But as we slowly steamed round the out-jutting bulk of Fort Konstantine (and surely we had some memory of the gallant Dacres, and his brave *Sanspareil,* and his three hours' defiance of yonder yawning case-mates), and as we gradually opened out the inlet and spacious harbour of Sebastopol—a great breadth of bright blue water shimmering in the sun—we found before us a most pleasant and cheerful-looking town, mostly of a brilliant cream-colour, terraced along the southern shores; the houses of a French appearance, with green and grey verandahs and sun-blinds; plenty of gardens and lawns

attached to the hotels and bathing establishments; the overlooking heights surmounted by domed white churches; and beyond and behind, stretching away inland, lofty slopes of a softly ruddy hue, with from time to time a yellow cloud of dust being blown across the face of the Malakhoff Hill. No doubt there was everywhere around a sufficiency of armament. Over there was Fort Alexander, beyond Artillery Bay; behind us Fort Konstantine; in the north the huge mass of the Sivernaia; but Sebastopol itself appeared quite a gay, lively, attractive-looking place, with no gloom about it whatsoever. And this great harbour, too, was full of animation; signallings from ship to ship; drill going on on the decks of the portentous men-of-war; small despatch-boats hurrying hither and thither; torpedo-boats steaming out to open sea for practice. There were but few pleasure craft, it is true: Sebastopol seemed busy and determined. Nevertheless, this blaze of

colour, both ashore and afloat, was grateful to the eye, and very different from what we had anticipated.

But as we lay here at anchor, during this long day, it gradually dawned upon us that we had adventured into a place where we were distinctly not wanted, and it appeared most likely that every kind of obstacle would be thrown in the way of our landing, if we were permitted to land at all. To begin with, we were taken possession of by a number of soldiers, sentries being placed here and there about the deck and at the top of the accommodation-ladder. They were rather good-looking fellows, those bronzed men in their unfamiliar uniform of dark green and flat white cap; but what struck us as chiefly peculiar was the strangely unintelligent look with which they stared at us strangers. Clear eyes they had, clear, light-coloured eyes; but they regarded us with a blank, animal-like observation that was almost pathetic. Or was it

that we felt there was between us the impalpable barrier of an unknown tongue? A French, or German, or Italian sentry would have been an ordinary human being: one might have offered him a cigarette—when his superiors had gone ashore; but these poor creatures seemed of an alien race altogether; they did not appear even to understand what their eyes told them. As for the officials who came to inspect the crew (for which purpose there was a general muster on deck) they were grave and courteous to a degree. And at last it turned out that there was to be no parade of the passengers: we were to be spared that dread and ignominious ordeal.

"We are all passed as sound," said the Major, buoyantly, coming up to Lady Cameron with the welcome news.

"Then they don't recognise incurable idiotcy as a disease?" said Peggy, looking him sweetly in the face. But we none of us knew what she meant.

Meanwhile, what was Hitrovo doing? Here was his chance. Here was his opportunity of distinguishing himself, of being able to do all of us a good turn—in especial, of showing himself sensible of the marked favour that Amélie Dumaresq had bestowed on him. We were strangers; this was his country; and, as the day wore on, it became more and more evident that we were in urgent need of some kind of intercession. The people ashore could not understand who we were, or what we had come for. A yacht?—a yacht of nearly four thousand tons? And what was any sort or size of yacht doing with such an enormous crew? No cargo?—but that would have to be proved: there would have to be an examination. From what we could learn, the authorities in Sebastopol appeared to be telegraphing to higher authorities elsewhere, asking how they were to deal with this incomprehensible visitor. The Purser and Doctor had gone ashore for pratique, certainly;

but nothing seemed to come of it; and in the mean-time we were prisoners, with those strange-looking sentries calmly and stolidly regarding us. Was it not for our Russian fellow-passenger and fellow-prisoner to come forward, and explain, and demand our release? We had no wish to wave the British flag over the battle-fields of the Crimea; we had no wish to make speeches, and form processions, and fire pistols, as they do on the other side of the Atlantic. We were a peaceful and harmless folk; we did not desire to look at a single gun or earthwork; we were ready to sign an undertaking that every Kodak camera on board should remain locked up in the cabins until our return, if we were allowed to land. There was not a single one of us who bore any grudge about the tearing up of the Treaty of Paris; probably not half-a-dozen of us could have recalled its provisions.

Well, our Russian acquaintance simply did nothing at all. He never did seem inclined

to do anything, so long as he could lounge, and roll a cigarette, and have a charming young woman to talk to him and amuse him. Amid all this confusion and delay and doubt, he was down in the saloon, along with Amélie Dumaresq ; and they were practising for the concert of the following evening. You could hear them as you passed the open skylight. Now it would be Wieniawski's 'Légende,' with piano and violin ; or again he would be playing the accompaniment, while she sang—with such little voice as she had—'The Talisman' or 'The Cossack's Lullaby.' And so she was going to show her Russian proclivities by singing one of these Russian songs before our asembled Orotanians ? But indeed that was not necessary. After her sudden, repentant making-up towards Wolfenberg, she had resumed her companionship with the young Russian in an almost too open manner. There was nothing more about 'Oats-pease-beans' and her return to America ; it was 'Ah, those

blue eyes, those eyes of blue,' or 'Loose and fickle was the band, Soon the ring fell from my hand'—and a constant occupation of the piano that the other amateur performers, anxious for rehearsals, grumblingly resented. And as for Ernest Wolfenberg?—well, he said it was but natural that Amélie should be interested in Russian music and in Russian songs, since here we were within sight of Russian shores.

But if peace and harmony and a happy forgetfulness of outward troubles prevailed in that hushed saloon, far otherwise was it in the smoking-room on deck, where two or three of our Orotanians were congregated together, sullenly or loquaciously indignant according to their various moods and temperaments. For the rumour had come along that our cabins were to be searched and all luggage to be overhauled; and this gratuitous insult to the English flag—as some of the wilder spirits made bold to term it—provoked a little heat.

The Major, in particular, was furious. He kept marching up and down this confined space, making angry little ejaculations from time to time; and now there were no women-folk present to impose some trifling restraint on his language.

"I'm as peaceable a man as ever wore Her Majesty's uniform," he asserted; "but I'm somethinged if I allow any somethinged Russian to come into my cabin and pull my things about. What excuse can they have for such a monstrous impertinence? I'm not a somethinged bagman! I do not carry goods for sale. I don't want to take anything ashore. Something them, I don't want to go ashore at all! Why should any one go ashore? We knocked the somethinged sawdust out of the somethinged place five-and-thirty years ago: what on earth is the use of going to look at a lot of tinkered-up ruins? Shoving their ugly heads into a private cabin, when you don't want to take anything ashore?—God

bless my soul, it is an unheard-of outrage—a monstrous outrage—that could only have occurred to a pack of half-civilised savages and Calmuck Tartars! They might as well rifle our pockets, and read our memorandum-books and diaries. I tell you if I find a somethinged scoundrel prying into my portmanteau or fingering my dressing-case, out he'll go neck and crop—and in double quick time too!"

Evening fell. The outermost fort—Fort Konstantine—loomed massive and sombre against the ruddy after-glow; in the southern heavens the moon shone clear, and there was a long and trembling lane of silver across the now darkening bay; inland the twin lighthouses of East Inkerman and West Inkerman, one beyond the other, showed each a steady golden star.

Then came dinner; and in the brilliantly-lit saloon we forgot all about the adjacent land and our imprisonment. The ship had become

our home; it had its own circle of interests; some of us, indeed, would have been content never to have gone ashore anywhere. And on this occasion Amélie Dumaresq, who was in very vivacious spirits, was telling us all about the forthcoming concert—who were to do what—the difficulties of the organisers—the shyness of those who could sing, and the embarrassing offers of those who could not—and so forth. But the astonishing part of it was that our gentle, retiring, modest-eyed Baby had actually been persuaded into giving a recitation.

"Emily!" cried Lady Cameron, in remonstrance. "What do you know about reciting? You'll break down before all those people."

"They came and told me that every one was refusing," replied the Juno-eyed maiden, blushing very prettily and ingenuously, "and —and so I said I would do my best—"

"You?" said Peggy, again. "You stand up before a lot of people? What next?"

"If it is no secret," one interposed, "will you tell us what piece you have chosen?"

The Baby looked up rather timidly.

"'The Charge of the Light Brigade,'" said she. "I—I thought it would be appropriate—"

"My dear child!" said the elder sister, glancing quickly across the table to Amélie Dumaresq. "You forget. Suppose Mr. Hitrovo were to be present—"

It was curious to notice how instantly and naturally Miss Dumaresq undertook to answer for the young Russian—who was at another table.

"Oh," said she, with confidence, "you need have no fear on that score. Mr. Hitrovo is far too much a man of the world, too much of a cosmopolitan, to be very sensitive about such things. And besides you must remember that the 'Charge of the Light Brigade' was hardly what you would call a victory. Rather

the reverse. A splendid blunder, no doubt, that the Russians admired as much as anybody; but it just about meant the destruction of the Light Brigade, so that it couldn't be quite a victory. I will answer for Mr. Hitrovo, Miss Rosslyn: if he hears you recite to-morrow evening, he will be the first to clap his hands."

After dinner, again, when one or two of us had repaired to our accustomed retreat aft of the wheel-box, we were to hear something more of that medley of an entertainment; for it appeared that our burning Sappho had agreed to take part in it, so that the event was assuming importance.

"I should not at all wonder if she wrote something specially for the occasion," Lady Cameron said, as she was idly looking across the black waters to the lights of Sebastopol. "I really do think that if you knew how hard she works, how desperately in earnest she is, you would have far more sympathy

with her. She seems to consume herself in her eagerness to express powerful emotion. Why, I have seen her walking up and down in a kind of trance; and every time she passed me I could hear her saying to herself: '*Strong—strong—keep it strong—passion—fire—no slack moments—onwards—onwards—a white heat—no food for infants—the soul in revolt—flame—pressure—whirl—strong—strong!*' And do you think that was not consuming herself? Think what she herself must be going through all the time. Think of the cost of such a constant strain—the sword wearing out the sheath—"

"A substantial sheath! She weighs twelve stone if she weighs a pound."

"Really, I did not think envy could make you so mean! Why, you ought to admire and sympathise with her noble aspirations, even if you don't honestly like everything she produces. But wait till you see her novel!"

"Her novel?" And at this Mrs. Threepenny also pricks up her ears.

"She has confided to me something about it," Peggy says, with an air of quiet dignity. "She has shown me the outlines. And I can tell you that English society will long remember the appearance of that book. The highest circles, the most exclusive circles, are to be exposed and denounced; their vices lashed and scourged; a mirror held up for those gorgeous, depraved, and ruined and conscienceless creatures to see themselves in —and shudder. And then, by contrast, the hero: a godlike Greek, seven feet high; owner of three Khanates, six hundred Ukraine thoroughbreds, and twelve chests of rubies and emeralds, each as big as a hen's egg; knowing all knowledge that has ever been known; capable of speaking thirty-three languages all at once, and strong enough to bite a horse-shoe in two with his front teeth—"

"Peggy," said her nearest companion, in

a low voice, "take care. Isn't that Miss Penguin along there by the skylight?"

"Ah," she continues, though in a more cautious key, "that will be a revelation indeed, when the glitter and tinsel of English society are torn off, and the fearful decadence and rottenness laid bare to the world. Wait till you see how English club-life has the truth told about it at last—its luxury, and selfishness, and heartlessness—— "

"*Basta, basta!* It has all been done."

"Done? By whom?"

"By a countryman of yours."

"Which countryman of mine?"

"Mr. Maunder Bathos."

"I never heard of him."

"That also is possible."

"Who is he, and what is he, anyway?" she demands.

"He would probably call himself a man of letters. He writes for American newspapers and magazines. He is unhappily afflicted

with a profound sense of his own provincialism; and finds relief, from time to time, in little outbursts of Anglophobia. Then he came over to England for a while —and that was his chance. He wrote a series of articles for a New York weekly journal, in which he described what he called the British Aristocracy, their haunts and ways, their appearance, their morals and manners, their cookery, their clubs, their wines. He drew a sad picture. The women were all outrageously plain. The men were supercilious, ignorant, and without an *h*. Go where you might amongst the gilded saloons of Mayfair and Belgravia, you could not see a single well-dressed man or woman. The cooking was awful: the food not fit to be thrown to pigs. The wines worse; the American connoisseur could not get a glass of Chatteau Pomerie or Veuve Lafite that he could put to his lips. The treatment of servants was inhuman and cruel beyond

credence: a Duke would get up at his own dinner-table and cuff the ears of the unfortunate 'slavey' until his guests had to interfere. The high-class clubs were nothing but haunts of frantic gambling; the outer doors were shut for hypocrisy's sake at midnight; but after that any one behind the scenes knew what was going on. Yes, the 'hig life' in England caught it that time; and yet the curious thing was that while Mr. Maunder Bathos was describing the gilded saloons of Mayfair, and the evil looks and habits of the English upper classes and their infamous cookery, he was himself all the while living in lodgings in the Strand, taking his meals at a Fleet Street restaurant, and picking up such casual acquaintances as he could at this or that American bar—the only people he met in England."

"Oh, well," says Peggy, doubtfully, "he was a stranger; and he had to do the best he could for the paper that commissioned

him to write those articles. But Miss Penguin is an Englishwoman; she must know something of English life—— "

"And English clubs. Did she call on her friend the housekeeper, and get shown through the empty rooms before any of the members came in for breakfast? And what can she know of the splendid profligacy of the English nobility—that dowdy old spinster going about nursing her hideous pug?"

Peggy rises to her feet—with a kind of a sigh.

"I cannot stay here any longer," she observes. "I think the earth ought to open —or the sea—or something. I'm going away down to the saloon, to listen to the rehearsals for to-morrow evening's concert."

And yet we were not long left alone—here in this spacious darkness throbbing with near and distant lights. It was Wolfenberg who presently came and took the place she had vacated. He was a solitary man; he had

made few friends on board; perhaps his thoughtful eyes and his habit of absent contemplation were not conducive to the formation of chance acquaintanceships. But on this occasion at least he was sufficiently cheerful and communicative.

"I have just had a most pleasant experience," he said, in his quiet and gentle way. "And I must tell you. For it is something to be in touch with two young lives that have everything clear and auspicious before them; it is something to be able to look on; it is a beautiful thing; it is like the world grown young again. Of course, it is only a guess of mine; but, at all events, I am revealing no secret; for no secret has been confided to me; and my guessing can't hurt any one, whether it is right or wrong. Didn't you tell me that young Julian Verrinder——"

There!—we knew it would be out sooner or later. We knew some one would suspect

—would make inquiries—would perhaps even question Lady Cameron herself; while those two young idiots, in their shyness, or fright of possible consequences, or in their guilty remembrance of past misdeeds, were fondly and insanely hoping that their secret might remain a secret for a quite indefinite time. But what was it that had aroused this dreamer from his reveries, and brought back his attention to what was happening immediately around him?

"Didn't you tell me," he asked, "that young Julian Verrinder was very well off?"

"So it is said. He has recently succeeded to the family estates, and they have been nursed for a good many years by his mother, who has the reputation of being a shrewd-headed woman. So the story goes. And his uncle, who has no family, is one of the richest men in the House of Commons."

He considered for a moment or two.

"That makes me less certain," he said.

"For a young fellow just come into a large property might be careless—ready to indulge in any kind of whim, however costly, especially where a pretty girl is concerned. But still—still—three hundred pounds cannot be quite a trifle to anybody; and three hundred pounds for a sketch in crayon——"

"A sketch of a young lady's head, perhaps?" suggests Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with downcast eyes.

"Yes; with some little bit of a background —the rigging, or what not—as a souvenir of the voyage——"

"And the young lady?" inquires this miniature Mephistopheles, with the most innocent air.

"Why, Lady Cameron's sister — Miss Rosslyn."

"Oh, really. Oh, indeed. Well, I am sure you will make a charming study of her, if you accept the commission," she says —for she is as silent and discreet as the

grave when any of her young friends have confided their trumpery little secrets to her.

He shook his head and smiled.

"No, I cannot do that. I cannot encourage the boy to fling away his newly-found money. But I will try about a little, and see if I can find some suggestion: I had a look at her now and again this evening: once, towards sunset, when her face was in shadow, I thought there was something rather striking; there is a curious combination of youthful gravity and timidity with a certain largeness of manner and repose—something almost sibylline in the set of her shoulders and her face and her great eyes: well, I will try about a little—it will be something to do if those Russians confine us to the ship. And if I can make anything of the sketch, then it will not be a commission: I will keep it by me—and give it to them as a wedding-present."

He was silent for a second or two. Then he said——

"And if my guess is right, isn't it a beautiful thing to think of: those two young lives, with their way clear before them, no entanglements or burdens, the fates all propitious, youth and hope holding out both hands to them. And a beautiful thing for others to look on at, even if they have their hidden little mysteries and shyness; it will lend quite a new interest to our wanderings in this ship. That is, if I have guessed aright. Do you remember the first bird's-nest you ever discovered?—the startled eyes of the bird—and you just about as startled, and rather wishing to withdraw: well, multiply that a million times, and that is how you come upon a human secret, the secret of two young lovers, that they have been keeping concealed to themselves. And you would rather go away; yet you cannot choose but look—from a little distance—and surely with well-wishing eyes."

So he rambled on, in a curiously sympa-

thetic and wistful kind of fashion; little suggestions here and there; fancies as they occurred to him; but nothing very consecutive. And more and more of late he had got into the habit of talking as though all the interests of life were over for him; as if the future held nothing for him; as if he were a mere onlooker, apart and isolated. Not angry, nor resentful, nor disappointed; only standing by himself, alone. And this man, so solitary, so unselfish, so uncomplaining, seemed also so grateful for any little friendliness—for even this opportunity of aimless confidential chatting—that the person whom he chiefly addressed had not the heart to tear herself away. She lingered long; she said such pretty and kindly things as she could; she tried to convey to him that he must have many friends. But when at length she went below, to the privacy of her own cabin, her mood changed.

"Yes," said she—and there were proud

and indignant tears in her eyes—"it is all very well for him to put so brave a face on it; and to keep silent; and to pretend that he is well satisfied to play the part of a dispassionate and unconcerned bystander. To listen to him, you would think he had no sense of having been forsaken, or put aside for new friends, or anything of the sort: he has had his day; the world is for young people; and he is glad it should be so. Very well; he has plenty of courage for anything; he is not one likely to pity himself or to ask for pity. And yet, all the time he was talking, how could I help thinking of that woman down there in the saloon—that laughing and heartless creature, with her Russian and her sentimental love-songs?"

CHAPTER IV

"GOD SAVE THE CZAR!"

SUDDENLY the silence of the dawn is broken by a shriek—a shriek so shrill and piercing, so terrible in its import, that we can associate it with but one tragic deed: surely the Major has borrowed a sabre from one of the sentries and slashed off Phaon's head? But when one hurriedly—and discreetly—peeps forth, it is another warrior who is seen to be disappearing round a corner—a military gentleman in a green uniform, with a broad, flat, white cap; while over there at the door of her cabin stands Sappho, in a hastily-donned dressing-gown, her hair untidy, her cheeks aflame.

"Who is that man!" she exclaims, in tones of vibrant indignation. "I want to know

which one of them it is: I will appeal to the Captain: it is monstrous that Englishwomen should be insulted by these savages——"

But, behold! even as she speaks, her enemy returns; and he is accompanied by other two of his kind—all bronzed, bearded, serious-eyed, silent, and observant. At the sight of this overwhelming force, Sappho hesitates for a second; probably thinks it useless to put her wrongs into words; then with a withering look of scorn directed upon all the three culprits, she retires into her room, slamming the door after her.

Hers is not a solitary experience. For the fact is, that the whole blessed ship is simply swarming with Russian officials on this bewildering morning: officers and soldiers in every sort and colour of uniform, prying, searching, secretly confabulating, poring over lengthened documents, or standing sentrywise and solemn, with a dull and hopeless stare; while, as the ladies appear at breakfast, one

after another has the same angry tale to tell of a bearded and white-capped head having been thrust into her cabin while she was dressing, or even before. And as the morning passes, matters do not mend one whit. Those grave persons in uniform, some with spectacles and some without, seem unwilling to do anything. They may be too polite to say so, but it is easy to guess that they would be very much pleased to see us weigh anchor and get clear out of the place. We are strangers, and, therefore, to be dreaded. Indeed, it is odd to think that the disposition towards a mysterious secrecy, and the suspicion and distrust of visitors, which Laurence Oliphant described years and years ago—before the Crimean campaign, in fact—as pervading the officialism of Sebastopol should still prevail there. More than that, as the time goes by, rumours reach us that our mere presence in the harbour is provoking some ill-feeling ashore among gentle and simple alike.

"And what could be more natural?" demands Amélie Dumaresq, who has blossomed out into a full-blown Russomaniac. "I can quite understand how they should be resentful. What have we come for but to look at battlefields?"

"There are one or two of us who have come to visit the English graves," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, in her gentle fashion. "There can be no objection to that, surely."

But the young lady is not to be persuaded out of her partisanship.

"Even if that is so, how are those people ashore to understand? They must consider us merely a crowd of English come to gloat and triumph. It is not at all surprising that they should be indignant. And it seems to me the Russian officials have treated us with the greatest consideration——"

"In keeping us prisoners?" Wolfenberg interposes, laughing.

"No, but in excusing us the muster on

deck," she says. "This is one of their chief naval stations, and of course they are afraid of infection being brought in by strange ships. I should not at all wonder if they imposed a fortnight's quarantine on us——"

"Oh, good gracious!" exclaims Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with alarmed eyes. "I'm for running away, as fast as ever we can go!"

"And supposing you have caught a Tartar, who won't let you?" one asks of her—and a kind of awful gloom settles down on the group.

Meanwhile, if we were condemned to an enforced idleness, the scene around us, outside the *Orotania*, was busy enough. A constant activity prevailed in the spacious harbour; ponderous men-of-war and agile torpedo-boats were steaming hither and thither—the officers scanning us curiously as they went by; while ever and anon a ship's cutter, with reefed sails —for there was a stiffish breeze blowing— would slash along under our stern, the sun-

tanned clear-eyed occupants gazing up to see what they could see of the English captives. But our durance was not to last for ever. In spite of all delays and obstacles and hesitations, our indefatigable Purser still persisted; and eventually, as the day wore on, he triumphed. What means he employed to smooth away opposition can only be conjectured; but a casual observer might have noted that a good many of those Russian officials were conducted into the saloon, while the steward in attendance was kept coming and going. Whether any more substantial form of persuasion was resorted to it is useless to inquire; all ended in amity; the announcement was bruited abroad that we were free to land when we chose; and not only that but a far more astounding piece of intelligence made its way through the ship—we were to give a ball on the very next evening, to which the Russian officers and their wives were to be invited! Here indeed was a triumph of

patience and good-nature. All of a sudden we had become friends. There were no more angry protests against cabin-doors being opened by too-inquisitive officials. The only question that now remained was whether we had any champagne sweet enough to offer our guests when, on the following night, they went down into the saloon for supper.

And instantly the torpor that had so long prevailed on board the *Orotania* was changed into an alert despatch; parties being hastily formed; the women rushing off to get ready; the steam-launch being brought round; one of the ship's boats hoisting sail for a water-excursion to Inkerman Bay and the mouth of the Tchernaia. Amid all this bustle and confusion, Paul Hitrovo remained indifferent; and when Amélie Dumaresq and her mother appeared, it turned out that he hardly thought it worth while to go ashore.

"What is there to see in Sebastopol?" he said, with a careless smile.

"There is Russia to see!" the young lady said, with indignant eyes. "Not go ashore? But I insist. It is your native country—you must be there to receive us——"

"Oh, if I can be of any service," said he, with great politeness, "then it is different." And therewith he took the two ladies' sun-shades from them, that they might get down the accommodation-ladder unimpeded.

And Wolfenberg? Well, he lingered behind a little, hesitatingly, looking after them. To be sure, he might have gone with them: there was plenty of room in the steam-launch waiting below. And if they did not specially and pointedly ask him, was any invitation necessary? But just at this moment Mrs. Threepenny-bit came adroitly forward: her quick eye had noticed his uncertainty—perhaps, also, something else in his look.

"Mr. Wolfenberg," said the little woman, in her kindest and most insinuating fashion, "don't you think it is too late in the day

to do anything? The ship will be so pleasant and still when all those people have gone."

He turned to her with obvious gratitude; this offer of companionship was friendly and sympathetic. He said that a quiet afternoon on the deck of the empty ship would please him better than anything. But might it not be put to some use, too? Over there was Miss Emily Rosslyn, standing talking to the third officer: could she not be induced to remain on board, and he would fetch up materials and begin the sketch that young Verrinder had set his heart on? Now nothing could have given our Arch-schemer greater delight than to be entrusted with this mediation—a mediation in favour of two faithful lovers!—and so it came about, in a very short space of time, that while Lady Cameron, and the Major, and Sappho, and the pug (with its head not yet shorn off) had all departed for Inkerman Bay, the Baby—the solemn-eyed Baby—timid, fearful, and conscious of the

desperate perils environing her—was here with us on the quarter-deck; and young Julian Verrinder, under some pretence or another, had also stayed behind.

It was a pretty spectacle that those two young folks offered; and, was, perhaps, as interesting to some of us as the Ruins of Inkerman or the streets of Sebastopol. For while Miss Emily seemed embarrassed and a little bit frightened—being, no doubt, well aware that, if the ultimate destination of this picture were to become known, her dreadful secret would at once be suspected—Julian Verrinder, quite careless as to that, could not conceal his joy that the priceless sketch had at last been begun. He waited humbly and assiduously on Wolfenberg, lest the easel should want shifting, or some little service of that kind be required; and he was most solicitous that not a sound should distract the artist's attention.

"For goodness' sake, quartermaster, don't

make such a noise with those chairs! Can't you leave them where they are?"

Then one of the younger officers, finding himself in idleness, opened the deck-piano, and began to play "Home, Sweet Home." It is a plaintive air; but it loses some of its effect when performed slowly and hesitatingly with one finger. Verrinder went to him—

"I say, Kingston, I wish you'd stop. You don't mind, do you? The fact is, Mr. Wolfenberg is engaged in a rather important piece of work." And then he returned to the neighbourhood of the easel, where those beloved outlines were gradually being transferred.

Meanwhile the artist was good-humouredly trying to convey some confidence to his sitter. Guessing at the origin of her embarrassment, he was pretending that this was not a portrait at all.

"It is very kind of you to become my model," said he, "though I don't know whether there may be any result. I must

wait for some suggestion. Perhaps a head of Bellona would be the most appropriate among all these forts and guns."

But this proposal entirely alarmed the younger man. It was a portrait he wanted—and he was willing to pay 300*l.* for the same. What to him was Bellona, or any other goddess, save this present and all-incomparable one?

"Bellona?" said he, anxiously. "But—but—a likeness?—an absolute likeness at the same time? Oh, yes, any imaginative subject you like, Mr. Wolfenberg—only an actual likeness, that any one could recognise? The fact is, I want to have it photographed—and—and enlarged copies made: there are several people in England to whom I should like to give one. And do you think Bellona is a good idea? Of course, if you see it that way, it is sure to be splendid—but—but I should have thought something more gentle—something more gentle and winning—

would be more—characteristic. Of course you could make Miss Rosslyn look very noble and fine—of course you could do that—but I should almost prefer a likeness that I could show to a stranger—"

"I am not a portrait painter," Wolfenberg said, pleasantly. "I'm only a kind of experimentalist, and I must wait to see what Miss Rosslyn herself may grow into. In the mean time I must ask you not to make personal remarks about my model; for that brings unnecessary colour into her face."

"Oh, I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon!" said he, abjectly; and he withdrew a foot or two—so that the precious work should not be interfered with.

It was a tranquil afternoon. For while we did not seek to know how the portrait was progressing (and it would have been impertinent to look), it was enough for us to sit under this awning and listen to Wolfenberg's curiously interesting talk: talk

that consisted of disjointed sentences, with no kind of effort or display about it, but that nevertheless was singularly attractive through the transparent sincerity of the speaker. These random observations about what he had seen in the world were so obviously honest; sometimes, too, they had a certain quaintness and originality; certainly they were unpremeditated, suggested by anything of the moment. A gull chanced to fly past. Didn't it seem a simple thing that an animal should sustain itself in the air, and choose its way of flight? Yet, who could have imagined such a thing beforehand? Wasn't Mother Nature an extraordinary inventress, constructing creatures to live in the most impossible conditions? If the human intellect had been asked to devise animals that could exist under the ground, or in the sea, or suspended over our heads, wouldn't the answer have been a smile at such an absurdity? And so forth. His talking was

merely an accompaniment to his work; but it was sufficient for his companions. And he spoke cheerfully, too. Had he forgotten those who had gone away ashore? At all events, if Mrs. Threepenny-bit had offered him her society out of some occult compassion, he seemed to be sensible of her kindness. Ship-acquaintanceships are mostly superficial; but in this case there was something more; and she, on her part, made no secret of the great liking and esteem and sympathy she had for this man. If only she could have seen forward through the next few months.

With the approach of dusk the wanderers returned; and so quickly thereafter came the night that the usual before-dinner tramp on deck took place in moonlight—the women, in their summer-hued costumes, passing up and down like mysterious ghosts under the shadow of the awning. But a stranger spectacle than that was unexpectedly revealed to us. We had been looking across the dark

water to the still darker town, where, on a height, there was a domed church that was almost black against the violet-blue of the moonlit skies, when all of a sudden that sombre building sprang into a silvery whiteness, and shone spectral there above the surrounding gloom. It was a marvellous sort of thing, this strangely brilliant dome hung high up in the heavens; but, of course, we soon divined the origin of this phantasmal illumination—the search-light of the Admiral's ship had struck that lofty church. And then again, and quite as suddenly, the dome was black; while the long shaft of radiance ran out in another direction, lighting up with startling distinctness the hull and rigging of a large steamer. No doubt it was all quite serious—probably part of the drill that seemed to be continually going on; though perhaps it looked a little like playing practical jokes. In any case, we were now summoned down to dinner.

And here again the search-light played its part, and that in an almost miraculous manner. For we had hardly got into our places when it became clear that Amélie Dumaresq had returned from her little trip ashore in a perfect madness of enthusiasm about Russia and everything Russian; and as she was a very assertive and impetuous young person, and would insist on all of us agreeing with her, it was perhaps just as well to "jouk and let the jaw go by." How she could have learned anything about Russia by looking into a few Sebastopol shop-windows was not easily discoverable; and indeed was not of much consequence; it was the length to which she carried her prepossessions and opinions that appalled us.

"For my part," she said, with rather a proud air, "I admire a country that has got a distinct nationality, and a definite place in history, and a definite aim before it—a country of a unanimous people, with a single

and all-powerful head, whom they are ready and willing to obey without a question. That is a country that obtains respect; it may be unfortunate or mistaken, but it has done its best; you cannot but admire its singleness of purpose, its patriotism, its community of sentiment. Why, they talk about our freedom at home—but what does it amount to?" (And it was here that blank dismay began to fall upon us.) "The United States are not a country at all; they are not a nation; they are only a collection of big parishes, all hating each other, and jealous of each other, and having separate interests. It was the North and South, last time, that were at each other's throats; next time it will be the West and East. As I say, we are not a nation at all; we have no national interests, no national purpose, no national speech—for the Germans, and Italians, and Irish won't let us have such a thing; and all that we can do is to sit on our parochial fences and

spite each other at a game of brag. That is not to belong to a country——"

Here she stopped. For of a sudden there was a most unearthly glare; and instantly all eyes were turned to the starboard ports which, hitherto black, were now gleaming with a strange phosphorescent blue. The next moment those round holes were black again: the Admiral's search-light had been withdrawn.

"Yes, no wonder you were frightened," Lady Cameron said, with a demure smile, to the young lady opposite her. "Weren't you expecting the heavens to open, when you were saying those dreadful things? It should be a warning to you. I am not a very enthusiastic American myself, since the West Highlands became my second home; but really, Miss Dumaresq, to compare the United States with a semi-barbarous country like Russia——"

"No, I will not have a word said against

the Russians," interposed the domineering small woman who is our final arbiter in all matters, and who, by good luck, generally makes for peace. "We are going to receive them as our guests to-morrow night, and everything is to be as pleasant as pleasant can be. There is to be universal consideration. They are not to put in a word of objection when we drive to-morrow to Lord Raglan's headquarters, and to the English Cemetery, and to Balaclava; and in the evening, when they come to the ball, we are all to be the best of friends. The little unpleasantnesses of these last two days are to be entirely forgotten."

"That's all very well now," says Peggy; "but at one time, Missis, things looked rather serious. I thought the English gentlemen on board were going to call a meeting and pass a resolution. That would have been serious, wouldn't it? For an Englishman doesn't call a meeting to pass a resolution

unless he's driven to it; but when he does——! I've a kind of idea that if Adam had been an Englishman, the moment he was turned out of Paradise he would have called a meeting—he would have called a meeting of Eve—and then passed a resolution declaring the recent proceedings to be quite unjustifiable."

"Peggy, do you want to be sent to bed?" says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, severely.

"No," she makes answer, with much meekness. "I would rather sit up for the concert, please."

Now, amateur entertainments on board ships are pretty much alike; but on this occasion there were certain exceptional features that more particularly appealed to, and unmistakably interested, our small circle. One of these was the still further development of Russomania on the part of Amélie Dumaresq. She made no concealment about it whatsoever. Did she imagine that the

mere neighbourhood of Russian shores would be a sufficient excuse for her choice of Russian songs and music; or was she grown blind and reckless in her infatuation?· At all events, the poor distressed mother, who had but little control over this perverse daughter of hers, came to us when we had all gone on deck to let the stewards clear the tables in the saloon; and there was not a little piteous anxiety and even alarm in the sallow-complexioned and yet rather attractive face and in the sad and troubled eyes. It seems that she had got one of the written-out programmes; and here was Miss Dumaresq in open and constant association with M. Paul Hitrovo — almost in defiance, as it were, of what our small public might choose to think.

"What am I to do?" said the poor woman. "She is so wilful. She will not pay heed to any remonstrance from me. I am afraid it would only make her go and

do something worse. But look at this—Russian songs—Russian instrumental pieces—and always with those two together. Don't you—don't you think it is very indiscreet? And if I were to say so to her, she is so proud, she would—oh, I don't know what she wouldn't do! She would consider it a challenge. She would wear Russian colours at the ball to-morrow night—I am so afraid of what she might do! But couldn't you interfere?" And here she turned to Wolfenberg, who happened to be standing with us. "She always listens to you. She would take your advice before the advice of any one; she values your good opinion so highly. And there are still a few minutes; you might tell her how it will make people talk to see her given over to Russian music, and playing in those concerted pieces with Hitrovo: there are not many programmes written out—they could be altered even yet——"

"But why—but why?" said he, gently.

"Don't you think Amélie has quite good reason for what she has done? She and Hitrovo are far and away the best executants on board this ship: it is but natural they should perform together. And as for a Russian song or two, why, we are in Russia, you know. And if she has been a good deal in Hitrovo's society, isn't that natural, too? They are both fond of music; both young; seeing much of each other, day after day; and these companionships are the commonest feature of a voyage——"

"But the people generally—what will they think?—what will they say? They may even consider it indelicate—this open parade!" said she—her trembling apprehension breaking in upon his good-natured assurances. "I never thought that Amélie would make herself the talk of any ship——"

"She will not do so," said he, with some air of quiet authority. "What she has done is perfectly within her right. If there were

to be any remonstrance, well, she is independent, and proud, as you say, and then she might do something unwise. At present no one would be justified in saying a single word against her—not any one."

At this very moment Amélie came quickly along from the companion-way, and put her arm within her mother's arm in the most affectionate fashion.

"Come along, Mimsey," said she, drawing her mother towards her. "Everything is ready; and you must be there to support me, and secure a good audience for me. I will say to myself 'Courage—courage—Mimsey must not be made ashamed.'"

And therewith all of us filed below and took our seats in the saloon, which we had come to regard as a very snug and cheerful and comfortable place. One could gather, if expression means anything, that this audience was willing to be pleased.

And indeed the various items in the pro-

gramme were got through most creditably, the instrumental music being especially good; and if Hitrovo and Amélie Dumaresq led off with Liszt's "Rhapsodie Hongroise," and if she sang "Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt" to his accompaniment, and if again they played together Wieniawski's "Légende," well, this public association was only what might have been expected from their previous and constant companionship. The mother looked perturbed and distressed; perhaps the warm applause that followed these performances was some slight consolation. But in this matter of general and hearty approbation, who could have foreseen that it was the shy, Juno-eyed maiden who was to bear away the bell? The poor Baby!—she was all trembling when it came to her turn.

"Will you go up to the head of the saloon," young Verrinder asked of her, in an undertone, "or stay where you are?"

"Where I am," she answered, almost

inaudibly, and therewith she rose, for the master of the ceremonies had announced the recitation.

She was terribly nervous; but there was something in this trepidation that seemed to catch the sympathies of her audience. It was in an uncertain voice that she began

'Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.'

—and no doubt it was the wish to give the timorous young thing every possible help that caused the intensest silence to prevail. As for Julian Verrinder, who had taken the seat next her, his anxiety was something dire to look upon. He dared not lift his eyes. He kept twisting his programme into all kinds of knots, his fingers shaking the while. And meantime the poor Baby, the burning flush in her cheek still visible, was struggling bravely with her task, and doing none so ill. She was rather

breathless, it is true; and she had no elocutionary gifts whatsoever; but she was young, she looked winning in her very shyness and timidity, and she was certainly among well-wishers. Only once did she falter. She had began the fourth stanza—

'Flash'd all their sabres bare,'

when there was a brief and desperate moment of hesitation; and we thought all was lost. But at the very same instant young Verrinder, still with eyes downcast, prompted her with the next line; and from thence she got safely on to the end. Nay, was there not some mild little effort at emphasis when she exclaimed,

'O the wild charge they made!'

At all events, this simple, school-girlish recitation had entirely won the hearts of the friendly audience; and when she modestly sat down again, there was enthusiastic applause; while Peggy, though not ordinarily a very emotional person, could not conceal from us

that she was wiping away tears from her lashes. For the Baby had come to be a kind of pet of this ship; and there was something that appealed to popular sympathy in her standing alone and struggling with her evident nervousness; and we were all of us immensely relieved and delighted when she got successfully through the ordeal.

There was a very different story to tell when Sappho (after an interval of music) rose to bestow on us another recitation. Small need was there for concern or disquietude on the part of anybody. Miss Penguin left her seat, marched up to the piano, and turned and faced the assemblage. Resolution was in her air; and an attitude of defiance in the somewhat dumpy figure. She meant to show us that she knew how to deal with us. It is true that a divine poetess should have been dressed in a simpler manner—in a costume of white and flowing robes, or something of that kind; whereas

Sappho's gown was almost gorgeous both in design and colour; but after all genius must be allowed its little eccentricities. And we had no time to think about plaits and furbelows when her commanding and scornful voice thundered out the opening lines of "Old Morgan at Panama"—

> In the hostel-room we were seated in gloom, old Morgan's trustiest crew;
> No mirthful sound, no jest went round, as it erst was wont to do.
> Wine we had none, and our girls were gone, for the last of our gold was spent;
> And some swore an oath, and all were wroth, and stern o'er the table bent;
> Till our chief on the board hurl'd down his sword, and spake with his stormy shout,
> "Hell and the devil! an this be revel, we had better arm and out.
> Let us go and pillage old Panama,
> We, the mighty Buccaneers!"'

This was something! There was no pretty shyness here; no mild appealing of maiden eyes; no young man twisting his programme into nervous knots. We were on firm ground;

Sappho had planted herself four-square, as it were; she was going to have it out with us. And she did—to the bitter end: though, to be sure, when the aggressive voice at length ceased, there was no such tumultuous acclamation as had greeted the Baby's bashful effort. Nevertheless she had done her part; she had given us of her best; and, when she returned to her seat, we bore her no ill-will.

Such were one or two features of this uneventful evening that were of more immediate interest to us; but the most striking incident of all occurred right at the close. Originally, when the programmes were drawn out, it had been arranged that the performances should wind-up with the singing of "Auld Lang Syne." But a patriotic English lady declared that neither she nor her daughters would have anything to do with these proceedings unless they were to terminate, as was fitting in an English ship, with "God Save the Queen;" and as this objection

seemed reasonable to the framers of the entertainment, "God Save the Queen" was added. Accordingly, at the end of the evening, we all of us, Americans included, stood up, while that rather lugubrious air was being played. And thereafter? Well, naturally there was nothing now save a decorous withdrawal. But there is a sort of solemnity about "God Save the Queen;" people do not hurry away the moment it has been played, any more than they hurry out of church the instant the service is over. And it was during this brief pause, while all of us were standing, and only one or two had turned to the door, that Amélie Dumaresq, with something of a firm and proud expression about her mouth, went quickly along to the piano, and sat down, and struck the keys with the full weight of her hands. There was instant attention. One recognised these powerful chords: here was something finer than "God Save the Queen." For who can

deny that the Russian Anthem is by far and away the most majestic and impressive of all these national airs? In dead silence she played—played with a massive grandeur of expression worthy of her theme. Nor was that all; for presently we could hear in the hush of listening that she was singing the hymn. She had not much of a voice, certainly; but she had courage; and her resolute intention counted for something. We could make out well enough what she had to say to us:—

'Lord God, protect the Czar!
Powerful and mighty
May he in glory, in glory reign!
He is our guiding-star,
Sovereign in peace and war,
Our faith's high Protector,
God save the Czar!'

There was no laughing bravado this time when she rose and came away from the piano. The natural pallor of her face was increased almost to ghastliness; her lips, too, were pale;

her eyes had a strange look in them. And she seemed to hang back a little from mixing with the crowd. But Hitrovo went forward to her, and extended his hand.

"I thank you," he said.

CHAPTER V

L'ENTENTE CORDIALE.

THE poor mother was well-nigh out of her mind.

"What will they think of her—what must they think of her!" she exclaimed, when next morning she found an opportunity of confiding to us her dire distress. "And she is so wilfully blind; she has such a disdain of public opinion; she will not see that she has openly compromised herself—"

"She has not compromised herself," said Ernest Wolfenberg, gravely. "That is not a word you ought to use, Mrs. Dumaresq, when you are speaking of Amélie." And then he went on in a lighter tone: "Why, the singing of the Russian National Anthem

was only a compliment to the country we happen to be in. From the first it ought to have been included in the programme; it was very good-natured of Amélie to step in and repair the blunder. No one else had the courage; but she always has courage enough for anything."

"But what will they think; what will the people think?" was still the piteous cry.

"They must be left to think what they like," he made answer. "How can they be expected to understand a girl like Amélie? They do not know her. They have not seen her work. They do not recognise in her an artist of original and distinctive gifts; a girl of great force of character, too; who has ways and opinions of her own, and is entitled to have them; and if they mis-interpret any little eccentricity, or bit of unconventionality or defiance or anything of that kind, then that is their look out: she is not likely to heed."

It was a skilful and ingenious defence. But was it the poor mother he was trying to persuade—or himself?

She turned to our Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"I hear you are going to drive to Balaclava to-day. Would you be so kind as to take Amélie with you? The fact is I got so tired yesterday walking about the Malakoff hill, and dragging myself up to the Redan—"

The pale and sallow face was suffused with consciousness; she knew that we knew why she was making this proposal. And although our miniature Major-domo was not unwilling to come to the relief of this alarmed and distressed mother, and to take over for a space the charge of her rebellious child, she had her own precise and definite ideas as to the conditions. There was to be no kind of collusion or connivance with Paul Hitrovo where *she* was concerned.

"Yes, we are off for shore as soon as the steam-launch returns. And we shall be very

glad if Amélie will join our party: Mr. Wolfenberg is going with us; and that would just fill the carriage."

She spoke distinctly; and again the poor woman, even in expressing her gratitude, flushed a little. She seemed to divine the disfavour with which this small person had come to regard the Russian. And, perhaps, at the same time she was secretly glad of it: at all events, she appeared to be very much relieved on finding that her daughter, who was bent on revisiting Russian soil, would do so under safe escort.

Miss Dumaresq, also, when she was made aware of this arrangement, was pleased to express her approval and thanks, though there was a touch of coldness in her manner, one fancied. Anyhow, she professed to be very friendly with Wolfenberg as we were going ashore; and if she looked round about before leaving the ship, as if seeking for some one, we had no right to assume that it was Paul

Hitrovo she had in her mind. Lady Cameron and the shy Baby were also in the steam-launch; and the former had on this occasion donned a very pretty costume—a blue serge jacket and skirt, the former open in front; a white woollen vest; a smart little silken neck-tie in the tartan of the Clan Cameron; while round her white straw hat there was a narrow band which bore a similar proud message to any one who chanced to know: she was not ashamed to wear the colours of Lochiel. Moreover, the novelty of this expedition seemed to have excited her somewhat; the wild-rose complexion was freshened up; her clear eyes were full of light, and interest, and animation; she was talkative more than her wont.

"I must find out the precise place at Balaclava where the Highlanders were drawn up in line," she was saying, amongst other matters. "I want to see where they gave that answer to Sir Colin Campbell when he

told them they must be prepared to die where they stood: 'Ay, ay, Sir Colin; an' need be, we'll do that.' I'm very fond of that answer. Yes, and I like the angry remonstrance that Sir Colin called out to the 93rd: 'Ninety-third, ninety-third, damn all that eagerness!' Phrases like that seem to show you things—"

"Peggy," interposed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "you can be a soldier's wife without using soldiers' language—"

"Why, these sayings are classical!" she retorted, not unnaturally. "Only—was it at Balaclava—or the Alma—that Sir Colin had to check the 93rd?—I am not quite certain—" But here we were at the landing-stage, so that these historical investigations had to be dropped.

And here also were the carriages that had been engaged for us—two-horsed open vehicles, the drivers thick-set, long-haired, sun-tanned men, wearing an outer garment not unlike that of a bathing-machine woman,

but heavily padded and quilted, with a flat blue cap on their head, and an elaborate silver belt round their capacious waist. We rather wondered at the mass of clothing, here in the broiling sunlight; but no sooner had we driven away from the harbour, and through the town, and up towards the heights behind, than we found there was a keen breeze blowing across those lonely and arid and far-extending plains. And with what a fury went those horses along the rutted roads!—and how we were thrown about and pitched from side to side, clinging on with desperation!—and in what rolling clouds the dense dust rose around us, to be swept away by that cold cutting wind! We had no idea of our whereabouts, or of what had aforetime happened on these desolate wastes; for our driver stared blankly when addressed in French or German; and, indeed, we were not over-anxious to distract his attention during this wild chariot-race. But it was now that

Amélie Dumaresq revealed the real mood in which she had set out with us; her feigned and cold complacency was abandoned; she was openly petulant and angry and discontented.

"This is perfectly absurd," she said, "driving through a country in absolute ignorance! We ought to have had some one with us who knew Russian. Yesterday everything was explained—everything was made clear—because Mr. Hitrovo was with us—and mamma was as interested as any one!"

It was hardly a civil speech. *We* had not sought her society; nor were we bound to crowd the carriage to accommodate her Russian friend.

"Why, Amélie," said Wolfenberg, in his goodnatured way, "I thought you were learning Russian—now is your time to practise."

There was no answer. But in truth it presently appeared as though she had some ground for grumbling; for the vehicles ahead

of us were now seen to be coming back—a sudden change of route we could not in the least understand. And a prodigious spectacle they presented, too: the furious-galloping horses, the bearded drivers, the carriages visible now and again amid the rolling volumes of dust looked more like a battery of artillery in mad retreat. As they thundered by us, they called out—what we could not hear. We could only turn and follow them, clinging on for dear life to leather or metal as we swayed and bumped and swept along, especially after we had left the main highway and were careering over tracks that were plentifully supplied with lumps of solid rock. The heavily-swathed, long-haired driver paid no attention to these obstacles, paid no attention to the turnings, paid no attention to anything, in fact, except to urge on his horses at full speed, so as to overtake the other carriages. And thus it was that at last we reached the farm-house which was Lord Raglan's head-

quarters, and in which he died; we entered and walked through the gaunt and empty rooms, on the doors of which are still the names of certain of the English Generals; then we passed down through the garden, which was most pleasantly bright and green amid the wide wastes of sand; and then we got into the carriage again, and surrendered ourselves to the mercy of those two intemperate beasts, to say nothing of the scorching sunlight, and the cutting wind, and the stifling clouds of dust.

Yes, we ought certainly to have studied strategic maps and plans before leaving the ship, and not to have trusted to obtaining information by the way. For what could the unassisted imagination make out of these desert altitudes, with their occasional patch of cultivation, and their flocks of cattle, sheep, and goats wandering about the stony ground or edging down towards the muddy and betrampled watering-places? We needed the

divine rage of Ajax to transform these peaceful creatures into solid masses of Russian cavalry. And yet they were about all that we saw as we drove across the sterile plains—on and on—and ever and ever south and east—until we began to descend to the coast-line again; then some trees and a house or two appeared; we swept through the small hamlet of Kadikoi; and at last came in sight of a little land-locked bay of brilliant blue-green water—steep heights surrounding it—a line of cheerful-looking houses along the shore—the picturesque ruins of an ancient fort up against the sky—with, finally, a twisting channel that obviously led to the outer sea. This was Balaclava; but if anybody had declared it to be Boscastle, in Cornwall, we should hardly have been bold enough to contradict him: the resemblance, in situation especially, is remarkable.

Several of our Orotanians had arrived before us; and we could see that Amélie

Dumaresq was anxiously, if furtively, scanning those groups as we drove up. But there was no Hitrovo there, nor any sign of him in the one or two carriages that presently followed: it was clear that he had remained on board ship. Now this was really a shameful piece of inattention on this part, after the marked favour she had shown him on the previous evening; for, although it is true she had been confided to our charge, he ought to have joined the general party on the chance of being of service to her at some time or other during the day. Nor did she scruple to exhibit her disappointment and dissatisfaction with everything around her. Wounded pride, one would have thought, might have prompted her to conceal her chagrin; but she was too much of a spoilt child to care for any such considerations; indeed, instead of looking on Paul Hitrovo's absence as an open slight, she appeared to regard it as part and parcel of our defective arrangements for the day.

"Nothing seems to have been provided for—no one seems to know anything," she said, sulkily.

And this again was most unfair; for here were we a swarm of hungry folk descending upon this little out-of-the-world place; and what had we a right to expect? As a matter of fact we were exceedingly well treated. Down by the shore, and connected with the land by a little gangway, there was a sort of floating annexe to the hotel; and here, in the open air, in the cool shade of a canopy, and at white-covered tables, a quite sumptuous feast was served. It was a little irregular, it is true; for as the hotel seemed lacking in domestics, certain of our younger Orotanians volunteered to act as waiters; and their method of procedure was to go into the hotel-kitchen and boldly seize on anything they could find, bringing the steaming and uncovered dishes across the intervening promenade. Indeed the rough-and-ready

banquet was far too profuse for luncheon; there was nothing to grumble at; on the other hand there was much to interest the curious. And Wolfenberg—well-a-day!—was trying to please this young lady, and to coax her into a better humour, by praising those Russian *plats*. Then he got a bottle of wine, and opened it, and poured out some for her. She hardly tasted it—and pushed the glass coldly away. But, happening to notice that the label on the bottle was printed in Russian characters, she changed her mind, raised the glass again, and took another sip.

"This is no *petit vin bleu*," said she—and we were quite glad to find there was something that met her approval, in this untoward mood of hers.

After luncheon we got a rowing-boat manned by two Greeks, and pulled away across the bay, and under the ruins of the Genoese fort, and along the twisting channel that leads to the open sea. It was curious to think that

through this narrow little strait all the vast stores and ammunitions for the great army encamped inland had to pass; this was the only highway of communication with the outer world that the English possessed. Still and peaceful enough it was now; the only signs of human life or occupation we saw were the stake-nets of the sardine-fishers.

The outer sea and the magnificent headlands did not detain us long; for we knew we should be going by the same coast on the resumption of our voyage; soon we were on our way back again; and in due course of time reached the landing-stage at Balaclava, and were ready to continue our route. But at this point something occurred that eventually led to most sad and sorrowful consequences. The carriages we had brought with us were pretty much common property, our good Orotanians, knowing that all were provided for, simply taking any one that was handy, and in some cases making an exchange of

companions, for the sake of variety. Thus it came about that the writer of these lines, perceiving a smart little victoria-looking vehicle, seated for two, suggested to Lady Cameron that she and he might take possession, conveying Miss Emily over to Mrs. Threepenny-bit; and as this arrangement seemed to suit everybody concerned, it was agreed to and acted upon at once; and presently we were all of us upon the road again, driving, as was understood, to the battle-field of Balaclava.

"This is very excellent," contentedly observed the young lady who was wearing the Clan Cameron colours.

"I think so."

"Oh, mind you, I understand. I am not flattered," continued Peggy, making herself comfortable in her corner. "Every one can see that Miss Dumaresq is in a frightful temper—I suppose because her Russian has not shown up; and so, having had enough of

her little ways all the morning, you take the first chance of escape."

"There may be something in that too."

"I say: have you considered this?" she went on—and for a few seconds she spoke rather more seriously. "If that young man should prove indifferent, after she has so openly flung the handkerchief to him, do you know what she will do? She will kill him."

"But why should he prove indifferent? She is extremely pretty; she can be most fascinating when she pleases; she has admirable accomplishments—if her painting is to be brought down to that level; and she is wealthy. What more?"

"Why did he not come over here to-day?"

"Well, there might be some excuse for a Russian not caring to visit Balaclava."

Peggy was silent and thoughtful for a little while.

"A woman scorned," she said, presently, "is a dangerous kind of creature, wherever

and whoever she is; but when she is such a woman as Amélie Dumaresq, with her proud and passionate nature—well, if I were a friend of M. Paul Hitrovo, I would warn him not to play tricks with fire and lightning."

At this moment, as we were passing through a village, our driver saw fit to draw up in order to water his horses; and as he alone did so, the other carriages continued on their way and very soon disappeared. The village was the little hamlet of Kadikoi or Kadikovka, in front of which Sir Colin Campbell, previous to the battle of Balaclava, had posted the 93rd Highlanders; and by rights our conversation should have been about military matters. But it wasn't. It was about all kinds of things, that need not be set down here; for the man was a long time in tending his beasts; and we were in no hurry. When again we set out we had the whole wide world before us; the others had long ago vanished out of sight.

And so we drove on, and drove on, very well content. The landscape did not much concern us; and, after the warning she had uttered about Paul Hitrovo, Peggy did not care to return to that dark and problematical subject. We drove on and drove on; the world forgetting, by the world forgot. Some mountains appeared in the north; but we did not know their name; and did not care. It was not until we had got up into the higher plains, commanding an extensive view, that one thought of looking out for the other carriages: there was not a trace of them anywhere in all that wide and lonely landscape. And then the awful thought occurred that our driver had missed his way or mistaken his orders; while there was no means of communicating with him, as he spoke nothing but his own tongue. The suspicion in course of time became a certainty. We were now well on our way towards Sebastopol, and were being carried thither against our will, without

having had even a glimpse of the battlefield of Balaclava, or the Causeway Heights, or the Valley of Death! This was a pretty position for the wife of Colonel Cameron of Inverfask: to have been in the immediate neighbourhood of the valley where the Light Brigade delivered their famous charge, and not to have even looked at it. Moreover, we were going away in the morning; the blunder was irretrievable; while questions, and appeals, and remonstrances were all thrown away on our puzzled and patient coachman. Peggy was distracted; it was not of her husband she was thinking; it was the base imaginings and sarcasm of a certain small fiend of a woman that she feared.

"What will she say now!" she exclaimed—her eyes full of laughter and confusion, her face flushed a rose-red. "She will declare we took the wrong road on purpose!"

"Lofty souls, conscious of their own rectitude, can afford to despise the insinuations of the

vulgar throng. But I wish I knew where the mischief this man is carrying us."

For apparently our good friend on the box, in answer to our prayers, had altered his route; but we were getting nowhither—not even to Sebastopol! On and on we drove, over those illimitable sandy plains, the only living creatures visible being a large number of hawks that kept hovering high in air and swooping down from time to time. The desert, furthermore, seemed to be everywhere strewn, and thickly strewn, with small white flowers; but these we subsequently found to be tiny snails in narrow and spiral white shells. For the rest, scant brushwood, long yellow roads, here and there the voiceless solitudes rising into a rounded hill: this was the land we found ourselves in.

"Well," said Peggy at last, "there is no chance now of discovering where those people have gone: we must be miles and miles away from the battlefield of Balaclava. And we

shall have to bear jeers and contumely as best we may. But there is one thing I must insist on: I cannot go back to England without having paid a visit to the English Cemetery. Good gracious! what would Ewen think—what would all our soldier-friends think—if I confessed that I was in the Crimea, and had landed at Sebastopol, and yet didn't go to see if the English tombstones were being looked after? They would think I was demented! Now where is the English Cemetery? This man must know; can't you get him to tell you? Try him! There must be some kind of language he can understand."

It was a maddening situation.

"Hier, Schwager!—Kutscher!—Isvoschick!—Yamschik!—sagen Sie 'mal—in Gottes Namen!—wo ist der englische Kirchhof—der Gottesacker—man alive, the English Cemetery!—the Cemetery—Cathcart's Hill—le cimetière—le cimetière anglais—il cimeterio—"

The patient, clear, questioning eyes re-

mained blank and vague. But there was still another kind of language. One had perforce to get down from the carriage, and with a walking-stick go through an elaborate pantomime of digging a grave. Then he seemed to comprehend. He pointed to a distant height, where there appeared to be a kind of wall, with some little touch of verdure surmounting it here and there. We eagerly assented. And again we were rolling along those arid plains, and down into a deep valley, and up a steep incline, until we stood in front of a small building forming part of a large, oblong, and walled enclosure; and here our troubles were at an end; for the stalwart person who appeared at the door, and who fortunately spoke French, told us we had found what we were in search of, explained that he was the custodian, and invited us to pass through the corridor to the Cemetery behind.

"After all," said Peggy, under her breath,

"I shall not be entirely disgraced when I go back to England." Indeed she seemed very much relieved, as we stepped down into those little alleys that ran between the clustered shrubs and the many memorial stones.

On the whole, we found the place fairly well looked after, though naturally, after these long years, a number of the tombstones and monuments show signs of decay. We wandered about for some time, recognising here and there a well-known name, and struck rather by the remoteness and solitariness of this enclosure than by any sadder associations. In truth, the general aspect of the English Cemetery is one of quiet and peaceful cheerfulness; to the eye it looks pleasantly green after you have driven over those sterile brown plains. Then we returned to the carriage and blindly surrendered ourselves to fate and the Russian driver. We had not the least idea whither he was now taking us. Nothing

visible anywhere but long undulations, intersecting roads, withered herbage, and a universal powdering of white shells : were we to find these around us for ever and evermore ? But of a sudden the world opened before us, and we looked down into it—looked down and beheld a shining white town and a blue bay ; beyond these the wider inlet, the shores of Sivernaia, and the out-standing mass of Fort Konstantine ; and high above all these again the open sea and the far horizon-line. And right in the centre of this spacious picture was our beloved *Orotania*—looking small because of the distance, but welcome as the sight of home.

When we arrived on board, we found Mrs. Threepenny-bit awaiting us at the gangway—amazement in her eyes, and in the rapid questions she addressed to Peggy. What had become of us ? Why did not the man follow the other carriages ? Why was he not remonstrated with ? And so forth. But, at all

events, she had no present opportunity of sharpening her sarcasms; for most of the women-folk had resolved upon dressing before dinner, it being understood that in all probability our Russian guests would arrive early. The consequence was, when our Orotanians, in obedience to the steward's bell, assembled in the saloon and took their places at table, they presented quite a gay appearance—the women in their smartest costumes, the men in evening dress; jewels flashed and sparkled; there was quite an unusual stir and animation. In the matter of diamonds, indeed, Amélie Dumaresq outshone all the others in splendour: she had a comb of diamonds and stars of diamonds in her raven-black hair, a necklace of diamonds round her neck, a buckle of diamonds at her belt, and a profusion of diamond rings on her fingers. 'Far too much display for a young unmarried woman' was no doubt the inward pronouncement of our diminutive but ruthless Censor-in-chief: on

the other hand, it was well known that the Russian ladies who were coming were given to similar ostentation, and why should their English or American sisters be eclipsed? Lady Cameron had brought hardly any of such adornments with her; and the poor Baby, *simplex munditiis*, had none at all; so that at our table the only gorgeous creature was the Spanish-looking young lady, whose liquid dark eyes laughed, and whose red lips showed a gleam of pearly teeth, as she chatted away in the highest of spirits. For she had entirely banished her untoward temper of the morning. Perhaps she had had from Hitrovo some explanation of his absence? At all events, she was now full of a vivacious and communicative gaiety, so that even her mother forgot her anxiety for the moment, and looked pleased and proud. And Wolfenberg?—he seemed pleased and proud too. He regarded her admiringly—perhaps conscious all the same of the little touch of make-up that

accentuated the black and high-arched eyebrows, and heightened the cherry-red of her smiling lips. And if he would rather have had her command attention and admiration in far other spheres and by far other means, well, that was a question for severer moments: why should she not, on such an exceptional evening as this, elate her heart with social triumphs, and, in mere matters of appearance and style and effect, carry off the honours of this improvised ball?

The scene on deck was exceedingly pretty. The whole of the after part of the ship had been covered in by canvas as a protection from the wind; and this impromptu ball-room was lit up by red and yellow swinging lamps, while there was an additional glow from the raised skylights. Soon our guests began to arrive—boat after boat coming across the smooth, moonlit water; there was a clanking of scabbards on the accommodation-ladder; there was a grouping of white figures around

the gangway. And presently a fine commotion prevailed on board; for our visitors had no thought of attending there and then to the strains of the band; they wanted to inspect this strange ship that had wandered into these unfamiliar waters; and, besides, the ladies had to leave their wraps and coverings below. There was everywhere an eager curiosity and astonishment, expressed mostly in French; not content with examining the saloon, they wandered hither and thither; you encountered fairy visions in the dark corridors leading to the lower deck; the occupants of the smoking-room—the old fogeys who did not wish to be disturbed by these frivolities—were startled by the apparition of a whole bevy of creatures in silk and muslin and satin, all with fans, some with bouquets, here and there one staring through a *pince-nez*. And when the dancing did begin it proved to be animated enough. In particular our visitors entertained us with

a peculiar dance — some kind of Russian mazurka—which was remarkably picturesque; the chief feature being that the gentleman (in this case an officer), before leading two ladies, one on each hand, down the whole length of the deck to turn them over to the opposite cavalier, made a little preliminary spring into the air, and clapped his spurs together. It was rather like the action of a gamecock; and one or two of our young men tried it; but leather does not make so effective a snap as steel. For the rest, the Russian ladies, with much laughter and good-humour, put their English partners through the features of the dance, and all went off very well.

Meanwhile, what of our small section of this assemblage? Well, we were mostly spectators; yet not uninterested spectators. What chiefly struck us was the open and unconcealed fashion in which Amélie Dumaresq devoted herself to her Russian friend. He

seemed to own her. If there had been any quarrel between them about his un-lover-like inattention of the morning, they had certainly made it up. It was waltzes they chiefly danced, and she engaged herself to no one else; when she was not dancing, they sate out, or she brought him along to talk to her mother; then, by and by, the low-breathing, seductive music would begin again, Hitrovo would claim her, and away they would go, her head bent a little down, her hand on his shoulder, gliding with swift and noiseless steps through the mysterious semi-twilight. Wolfenberg was standing with us, and looking on, in an absent kind of way. It is a pretty kind of thing, the waltzing of two lovers together, lost in the consciousness of their own happiness, lost in the consciousness of their possession of each other. But sometimes, elsewhere, it stabs deep.

As for Mrs. Dumaresq, she would probably have been still further distressed by this too

pronounced self-surrender on the part of her daughter, only that she had developed a new anxiety: it was about Amélie's diamonds that she was now concerned.

"She is so headstrong and careless," she said, in an undertone, to Mrs. Threepenny-bit. Then she continued, with a fond mother's pride: "There is no one here to-night who has anything like Amélie's diamonds—except, perhaps, that Russian girl who is going to be married, and these are really her wedding presents that she is showing off. And Amélie could have outdone her if she had known. Oh, yes, she could. What she is wearing isn't half what she has got with her on this very ship; it is a fancy of hers to take them with her wherever she goes; and there is no reasoning with her about the danger of it."

"She seems to be enjoying herself very much."

"Yes," said the white-haired dame, with a

bit of a sigh. "For the moment. And of course I am glad—glad to see her happy. But—but I don't know how it will all turn out: she won't tell me anything."

If she would not tell, other people could surmise. When — withdrawing from the music and the soft winnowing of dresses on deck and from the busy merriment of the supper-tables in the saloon—two of our Orotanians, a tall young lady and her smaller and more elderly friend, were bidding each other an affectionate good-night outside the door of their cabins, the one of them said, almost in a whisper—

"Peggy, I tell you I am convinced. Mrs. Dumaresq only suspects. But I am as sure as sure can be that there is at last some understanding, if not an actual engagement, between those two. And what is more, Wolfenberg has also guessed it."

"Have you spoken to him?" Peggy asked quickly.

"How could I!" said the smaller woman. "I dared not! But I know that he has guessed: I saw it in his face—when he was looking on at the dancing."

CHAPTER VI.

A SIGNATURE.

AND yet, while this dark problem of life and fate was being worked out under our very eyes, it was an excellent thing that we could turn aside from time to time and forget it, and be well content with Peggy's cheerfulness, and good-humoured ways, and happy enjoyment of the passing hour. She was not a person of mature years, it is true; but she had a sharp observation and a good memory; and she had seen something of the world and of human nature. The worst of it was that you could never tell whether she was truthfully relating her own experiences, or whether she was, out of pure devilment, romancing—in other words, manufacturing l**s. Who could believe, for

example, that she ever saw, in the streets of Boston, Mass., U.S.A., a man stop at a shop-window and seriously proceed to set his watch by an aneroid barometer?

"You are so horribly incredulous," she exclaimed, as she was briskly walking up and down the quarter-deck before breakfast, with an occasional glance towards the white barracks and the domed churches of Sebastopol. "I suppose, now, if I were to tell you of the man—— "

"What, another one?"

"Do not interrupt," she observes, placidly. "This man was also absent-minded; for, being driven distracted by the irregularities of the various clocks in his native town, he sat down and wrote a letter to Greenwich Observatory, begging the people there for goodness' sake to write back and let him have the exact time. So I have been informed, at least. But I suppose you wouldn't believe that either?"

"When you lie awake in the morning,

you seem to think of a good many queer people."

"Oh, that's nothing to what I could tell you," she remarks, with cheerful composure. "But it's little use talking to you: you are so suspicious. I dare say, now, you wouldn't believe me if I were to confide to you the great project that Sappho has in her mind?"

"What project?"

"Well, she is most furiously indignant—and I think naturally indignant—about the inhuman way in which bacilli are treated; and she is determined to get up a National Society for their protection. She says they have as much right to live in the world as we have; and yet they are subjected to the most merciless persecution—everything done to destroy them—and savagely cruel experiments made on their living bodies, without, in any recorded case, the use of anæsthetics. She is going to rouse the humaner instincts of the people of England; she will appeal to Parliament—"

"She may spare herself the trouble. Next session of Parliament is to be devoted to a Bill enabling the British Working Man to cremate his Deceased Wife's Sister."

"Will you listen?" she says, imperiously. "I can tell you, England will speak with no uncertain voice about this bacillus question. There is to be a procession of the women of London, headed by the Bishops, and they will march to the Royal College of Surgeons, and make a demonstration there. Exeter Hall is to be hired for a month. There will be a Children's Protest against the destruction of their little playfellows—"

"Oh, get away! Do you see who has just come on deck? Now be prepared to withstand a charge of cavalry, if ever you were in your life!"

Yet the approaching enemy has no great ferocity of outward aspect. She is a small and slender person, of elegant figure, with the gentlest of eyes, and the most winning of

voices. And it is with an air of truly angelic innocence and sweetness that she says—

"Why, Peggy, you've never had a chance of telling me what you thought when you were standing on the battlefield of Balaclava. It will be of the greatest interest to Sir Ewen to have you describe the appearance of the place, looking down from the Third Redoubt, you know, into the famous valley. You see, so few English visit the Crimea; and every one wants to know whatever can be learnt about the charge of the Light Brigade; and you had such an excellent view of the Causeway Heights and the Fiorkine Hills—"

Then Peggy, tall, proud, indignant, thus answers—

"I will no longer be insulted. I am going to seek out Miss Penguin. She, at least, treats me with a little humanity. And I am her confidante. Ah, if you only knew what you lose by being so cynical and hard-hearted! Why, at this very moment she is engaged on

a poem; and do you know what the refrain is? After the first line of each verse—

(*Pile high the blazing fire!*)

and at the end of each verse—

(*White heats of wild desire!*)

What do you think of that? But *you* won't see it. Not a bit. Such things are shown only to people who have a little human sympathy about them——" Here the bell rang; and for a moment Peggy stood confounded and uncertain. Then, without more ado, she put her arm within the arm of that diminutive fiend, and we all went down to breakfast together.

Now whether it was that the Russian officials had revived their suspicions of us, or whether it was they had grown so fond of us that they were loth to let us go, certain it is that there was a good deal of trouble about our getting away. Indeed, it was not until close on noon that the welcome vibration of the

screw told us we had started on our travels again—welcome, because we had become accustomed to the continuous sound and motion, and were impatient of lying idly in harbour. Of course all were on deck now to witness our departure, as we slowly steamed out between Fort Konstantine and Quarantine Bay. And the centre and soul of our particular group seemed to be Amélie Dumaresq, who appeared to have wholly thrown aside her temper of the previous day, and was now abounding in complaisance. Perhaps it was to obliterate recollection of those intractable moods, or perhaps she had some ulterior motive: at all events she was most affectionate towards our women-folk, and was trying to win their favour by all the arts at her command. Naturally the talk was of the incidents of the previous night's ball; and she was most enthusiastic about our Russian guests and all their manners and ways and customs.

"Do you know that that particular dance

is only danced on very special occasions?" she went on. "Didn't you think it very quaint and picturesque—the little spring in the air——"

"The Russian steppes have always been famous," murmured Peggy, under her breath.

"And don't you think it was most considerate of our third officer to take the silver coin that was given to him?" she proceeded. "Oh, didn't you hear? Well, he was at the top of the accommodation-ladder, looking after the people getting away in the boats; and I dare say the lamp did not show his uniform very clearly; and when the Russian officer, on leaving, handed him a franc, or the equivalent of a franc, I think Mr. —— showed great good sense and good taste in taking it and saying nothing about it. It was a harmless mistake —and—perhaps the Russian officer did not notice Mr. ——s' uniform; and, surely, it was better to be considerate, and not to offend any one by a refusal—when they were our guests?"

Then, as she was chiefly addressing her women-friends, her talk drifted on to costumes and diamonds; and nothing would do the young lady but that she must go away and fetch her own jewels, for the inspection of the curious. She was absent only a few moments; when she returned she brought with her a rosewood casket mounted in silver, and, sitting down, proceeded to take out tray after tray. Certainly the encrusted masses of diamonds she now produced more than confirmed what her mother had confided to our Mrs. Threepenny-bit on the previous evening; here indeed was a shining and superb display, even in cold daylight; her companions, eagerly interested, looked on as she revealed—with a little affectation of indifference, perhaps—these successive treasures.

"No, I am not satisfied with them," she said—her eyebrows carelessly raising themselves. "There are plenty of them; and most of the stones are of good quality; but

the different pieces are too scattered, too dissimilar. I must have some more comprehensive design. Some day or other I will have them taken to a first-class jeweller in Paris or Vienna, and get him to draw out sketches for a general and uniform re-setting: don't you think that would be advisable?" Then she fitted in the trays again, and carried away the valuable box to her cabin.

Now when women show their jewellery to each other, it is a confidential kind of thing; it implies intimacy; it is as if they were talking over secrets. And so, when Miss Dumaresq returned on deck, she came back to this little circle, and resumed these friendly and familiar relations. It was quite clear that she was determined to captivate everybody; and undoubtedly she could make herself most fascinating when she chose; there was a musical quality in her laugh that it was difficult to resist. Even her mother came in for a share of her blandishments; and we could see that

the poor woman, though affecting to repel all this coaxing and flattery, was immensely pleased none the less. And Wolfenberg?

"Ernest," said the young lady (as if by way of complaining), "why is it you are able to look at the beautiful side of things, and forget that anything else exists? For example, when you see a ship in full sail—in sunlight—on a blue sea—and surely there are few things more beautiful than that—well, that is all you look at, that is all you think of; whereas other people have to go further—they know that inside that beautiful appearance there is a hideous mass of ugliness and meanness—foul language, rum-drinking, tobacco-chewing, anger, jealousy, greed of wages, everything mercenary and vile. You go through life with a series of exquisite visions always around you; you live in a succession of fairy palaces. It isn't fair. Why should you have such a faculty? Why should you enjoy such immunity?"

"Immunity from what?" said he, in his tolerant way. For he never argued with her: he only offered suggestions—timidly watching her eyes the while for consent. "I'm afraid, Amélie, I cannot live in a fairy palace any more than any one else. To do that you would have to be a ghost. So long as you are a human being, you have to take the very substantial knocks and buffets that human life administers—and make the best of it."

"My dear Lady Cameron," she went on, turning to her next victim, "what a charming picture that will be of your sister when Mr. Wolfenberg has thought out some idea for it! It is precisely the face that will lend itself to his imagination—calm, mysterious, and thoughtful. And what beautiful eyes she has—and a dignity and repose of expression, too: singular in one so young. Mr. Verrinder is a fortunate young man to be able to give such a commission, and to find an artist able to undertake it."

Peggy looked startled, as well she might, for this was the first she had heard of the projected sketch; while for a second a shade of annoyance over this premature disclosure passed across Wolfenberg's grave and pensive face. But Miss Dumaresq took no heed; she was off and away again in her airy endeavours to captivate the hearts of our small set; but more especially, as it seemed to us, was she determined to win over the stern and uncompromising miniature despot who holds us in her iron rule.

Soon we were to discover the meaning of it all. For some little time after leaving Sebastopol the lonely and desolate shores of the Chersonese are flat and uninteresting, and we had hardly looked at them; but when you have passed the Cape and Monastery of St. Georgia, they gain in height and dignity; and again, when you have gone by the narrow strait leading into Balaclava harbour, the Crimean coast rises into a series of precipitous

cliffs that are lofty and picturesque enough, with their bare and splintered summits and their lower slopes powdered green with trees. Cold in colour was this coast, even while the sun shone along the ruddy-grey crags; and cold in colour was the sea, because of certain thin and wandering clouds; but, nevertheless, Miss Dumaresq must needs begin to talk of the beauty of the Russian Riviera which we were now approaching, and of its magnificent mountains, its perfect climate, and its princely estates and residences.

"So I have heard," said she; "for, of course, I have never been here myself. But don't you think," she continued, addressing herself insidiously to Mrs. Threepenny-bit, "that we ought to have the assistance of Mr. Hitrovo? As we sail along, he could tell us the names of the people who own the palaces. I have been looking at a rather antiquated map, and I see Prince Woronzov, and General Narishkin, and Count Potocki,

and the Prince of Ligne, and a great number of others; only we ought to know if the same people are there now. And Mr. Hitrovo should be able to tell us, naturally; and I am sure he would be so glad if he could be of any service. May I go and fetch him?"

So this was the origin and object of all her skilful flattery and fascination—to procure for him a friendly reception in that little corner of the quarter-deck usually occupied by our small circle? Well, we could not easily decline, whether we were interested in Prince Galitzin and Count Potocki or whether we were not. And to tell the truth, when the young Russian did come along, he seemed to be conscious of the humour of the situation; for, as a matter of fact, he, never having been in this part of the world before, had literally nothing to tell us; while Amélie Dumaresq, anxious to retain him, and anxious also that he should produce a favourable impression, kept plying him with questions, which he

vaguely answered with a certain smiling indifference. It was Mrs. Threepenny-bit whom mostly she strove to get interested in the young man; and her ingenious and subtle endeavours to do so were almost pathetic to witness. But Mrs. Threepenny-bit, as some of us have discovered, is a person whom it is rather difficult to cajole.

"He seems to think," she had said on more than one occasion, "that he has only to look at you with his wonderful eyes, and that that is enough. And I suppose it is enough—for a girl; but for older people—no. M. Paul Hitrovo is altogether too lazy, too nonchalant, too well-satisfied with himself. But as for his good looks, there's no denying them; and perhaps it is chiefly as an artist that Amélie Dumaresq worships such a beautiful young man; for, in truth, he does not appear to take much trouble about paying court to her."

However, the present circumstances were

quite exceptional. The small woman had but recently arrived at the conviction that there was some kind of understanding, if not an actual engagement, between these two; and did not this transparent stratagem on the part of the young lady afford some confirmation? Accordingly, she talked to Paul Hitrovo, studying him the while; and Amélie stood by, listening intently, and putting in clever little suggestions here and there to help him. Wolfenberg, some way apart, did not join in the conversation; he was regarding those two younger people, and seemed plunged in a profound reverie. Miss Dumaresq did not chance to look in his direction; she was altogether engrossed in having this deck-alliance cemented. Might not the young Russian hereafter be assumed to have become "one of us"? Peggy, like Wolfenberg, was silent; she did not approve of the intrusion of strangers.

But Peggy was not silent when, a short

time thereafter, she found an opportunity of separating herself from this little group. Another member of the charmed circle got up and followed her—followed her across to the rail, on which she leant with both arms folded, pretending to examine the features of the mountainous coast we were passing.

"Tell me," she said, in an undertone and yet rapidly, "what did Miss Dumaresq mean by talking of a portrait of Emily? Is Mr. Wolfenberg going to paint her portrait? And what has Mr. Verrinder to do with it? Really, I think I ought to have been consulted in this matter. What is it all about?"

"It isn't exactly a portrait," one tries to explain to her; "and there has hardly been anything done with it yet, until Wolfenberg finds a subject. It is a sketch, on the deck of the ship, and your sister has kindly consented to act as model."

"But what has Mr. Verrinder to do with

it?" she demands. "Why should his name be introduced!"

"Well, the sketch is a commission. Don't you think a young man of property is very much to be commended who spends his money in buying pictures? It is not a common form of extravagance nowadays."

"I know this," she says, with a certain severity, "that Mr. Verrinder is going about a great deal too much with Emily. And it isn't fair on his part. I won't have it. What does she know about such things? She is too amiable to repel his attentions, even if she understood them; but she doesn't understand them; she is too young; she is a mere child."

"Children of eighteen, especially when they are of the female kind, sometimes understand more than you might imagine."

"But Emily!" she says. "Who could associate her with secret interviews and stolen glances."

"Or missing the battlefield of Balaclava?"

"It's all very well," she goes on, unheeding, "but I will not have the Baby's innocence imposed upon. Years and years hence she may begin to think of such things; and even then I don't believe she will; she is much too serious-minded to encourage any young man. If you had studied her character as thoroughly as I have, you would know how entirely different she is from other girls of her age; and no one would be more shocked and indignant than herself at the idea that she was likely to fall into any such entanglement. And so Mr. Verrinder will have to learn to efface himself a little, and retire into the background."

She would probably have continued this subject, about which it was clear her mind was considerably concerned, but that those other people now left their places, and also came over to the rail. For we were approaching that part of the coast, from Alúpka onwards, where the Russian nobility have their seaside residences; and some of these looked

very imposing, amid hanging gardens and abundant foliage, with the vast limestone cliffs towering behind. Amélie Dumaresq, no longer doubtful of the success of her scheme, was in the very gayest of spirits, chattering to everybody at once, and making cruel sport of Hitrovo's indifference and his ignorance of his native land.

"Why, you knew you were coming to the Crimea, did you not?" she went on to say.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," he answered her. "I had no special wish, however."

"You simply came on board, and let them take you wherever they pleased?" said she.

"That is about it," he responded, inattentively, looking towards the shore.

"Well, you are the most extraordinary person!" she exclaimed, with a familiarity of tone and address of which she was herself perhaps unconscious. "Will you allow me to inform you that over there, amongst those trees, is the Palace of your Emperor?"

"Oh, really!" he said, without much concern. "That is Livadia, then?"

"And you not to know!" she cried, with her merry black eyes laughing at him. "At all events, when we get into Yalta, you must come ashore with us and show us that at least you can speak a little of your own language." She turned to Mrs. Threepenny-bit, and said to her, with a pretty expression of innocence—"I had always understood that French would serve you everywhere in Russia; but it didn't do so in Sebastopol, did it? However, it will be all right if Mr. Hitrovo goes ashore with us at Yalta, won't it?—and it will be so much more convenient if we make one party: don't you think so?"

The smaller woman did not answer. She had been trapped and tricked into this arrangement, she hardly knew how. But there still remained to her the alternative of politely declining to go ashore at all.

Yalta now lay right ahead of us; we were slowly steaming into the spacious bay. And if the cold colour of the Russian Riviera had somewhat disappointed us, we had at least to confess that the situation and aspect of this remote little watering-place were very beautiful indeed. The background a range of mighty mountains, grey and ruddy-grey in their sterile altitudes, but darker where the far-extending forests hung along their precipitous slopes; at their base a series of lower hills smothered in deep green vegetation; here and there, among the vines, and figs, and cypress, a red-tiled Swiss-looking chalet, with projecting roofs and verandahs; perched on one of these wooded heights, a pretty little white-domed church, with its gold crosses glittering in the sun; then down by the beach a long straggling settlement of houses and bathing-establishments, many of the former surrounded with gardens. Altogether a fresh, bright, cheerful-looking place,

snugly nestled under that mountainous rampart, and rejoicing in a luxuriance of verdure that was doubly welcome to the eye after the arid wastes and plains of the Chersonese.

But as for going ashore? Hardly had the sullen thunder of the anchor-chain echoed through the silence of this open bay when Amélie Dumaresq, all eagerness and joyousness, came hurrying along, bringing with her her mother and also her captured Russian; and it was clear she meant to carry us off with her in the very first boat. But Mrs. Threepenny-bit hung back a little. She glanced towards Wolfenberg.

"Do you think it is worth while," she said to him, "so late in the afternoon? We shall have the whole of to-morrow to wander about. And a place like this always looks best from the ship: you spoil it by landing." She turned to the young lady. "No, thank you; I think we will wait till to-morrow."

"You are the laziest people!" Miss Duma-

resq cried, laughing. "Come along, Mimsey!" And therewith she got her mother safely down the accommodation-ladder and into the boat; and presently they were on their way to the distant landing-place, across the slow-heaving and pellucid green water.

Mrs. Threepenny-bit again turned to Wolfenberg—he had been leaning on the rail, absently watching the embarkation.

"It is a wonderful thing to have youth," he said, "and a quick and warm pulse, and a vivid and eager enjoyment of even the veriest trifles. But in her case it may deceive you. She has the faculty of being so entirely absorbed in what is immediately around her, her wayward moods and impulses are so real to her at the time, that you might think she had abandoned other and for more important ideas or interests which, as a matter of fact, she has not abandoned at all."

"'Oats-pease-beans,' for example?" she said, with a smile. "Miss Dumaresq was

extraordinarily enthusiastic about that subject —for the space of half-an-hour or so!"

"I should not at all be surprised," said he, gravely, "if she were suddenly to take that up, when there was a proper opportunity, of course, and so concentrate herself upon it that she would put aside this voyage and all its circumstances as a matter hardly even to be remembered. Her mind is curiously tenacious of certain things: you never can tell when she may dismiss her present interests as insignificant, and revert to deeply-cherished purposes and ambitions. At any instant she might brush aside these temporary pre-occupations and show you her true self."

Was he still, then (the small woman might have asked herself) fondly hoping for a resumption of his old relationship with Amélie in spite of all that had happened during these last two or three days? But at this moment an apparently trivial incident occurred that entirely changed the current of her specula-

tions. We were idly walking up and down the after part of the deck, past the now vacated chairs. On one of these, which had "A. D." stamped on the back, a paper-covered volume had been left; and Wolfenberg, pausing for a second, took it up in his hands. The title outside was "Mémoires du Général Baron de Marbot. I. Gênes—Austerlitz—Eylau."

"An odd kind of book for a young lady to be reading," Mrs. Threepenny-bit observed.

"She is masculine in her literary tastes," he said, simply. "And I hear from her that the author describes certain episodes in his military career with extraordinary force and vividness; and also that he does not scruple about revealing the hideous horrors and sufferings of a campaign. That is no doubt what recommended the book to Amélie—she likes the downright truth—"

He was thoughtlessly turning over the pages. But of a sudden he stopped—stared

blankly for a second—then abruptly he closed the volume again and put it down as though he had found some poisonous thing there. His lips had quickly grown colourless; he seemed bewildered; for an instant or two he appeared hardly to know where he was. This emotion, which was only too evident, his immediate companion affected not to perceive; without attempting to disturb or distract him by talking she merely resumed that negligent stroll up and down which had been thus casually interrupted. We were to hear more of this occurrence later on.

As the dusk fell, the people came back to the ship; while ashore, the lofty mountains were gradually deepening in gloom; and in the town small dots of yellow fire had already become visible. Out to sea, on the other hand, masses of louring purple cloud had gathered along the southern horizon; and from time to time there flashed across them quivering glares of lightning. We began to

wonder what we should do in this open roadstead, that has no sort of protection whatever from the south, if a gale were to spring up in the night. Already there was a slow, heavy, oily swell coming in that might have been taken to presage a storm. How about our holding-ground? Or should we have to get up steam, and clear out, and face whatever might be approaching?

But all these vague and unprofessional alarms eventually resolved themselves. With the dark came peace, and silence, and the calm of moonlight. By slow degrees the scene before us assumed a strangely fantastic and unreal appearance; for while the vast spaces of forest that covered the slopes of the mountains were obscure and undecipherable, far above these the precipitous limestone peaks and crags, rising into the serene heavens, shone a spectral grey. The little white town, too, with its innumerable points of golden fire, seemed to come out of that

mysterious background of sombre foliage; it looked as though it hung in air, over the black and unseen sea. Nevertheless the silence was not absolute: across the intervening space of water we could hear some faint sound of music—so faint, indeed, as at times to be almost inaudible.

We had sought out our accustomed nook along by the wheel-box; and on this evening it chanced (for a while at least) that we three were alone.

"Peggy," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, almost whispering, "I have something so singular to tell you. Did you notice, when we were walking up and down this afternoon, that Mr. Wolfenberg stopped at Amélie Dumaresq's chair, and took up a book she had left behind her?"

"I saw you looking at a book, certainly," Peggy responded, "but I paid no particular attention."

"And neither did I at the moment. But

all of a sudden, as Wolfenberg was carelessly turning over the leaves, and talking of Amélie's love of literalness and vividness, he came to a sheet of note-paper that had most likely been used as a mark; and then something very strange appeared in his face, and he hastily put the book down again. Whatever it was, he was much moved; I could see that; but, of course, I did not speak; and he said nothing."

The small woman hesitated, and seemed a little embarrassed.

"Yes, I will confess," she said, in the same low voice, "I was curious—more than curious; I was anxious; my sympathies are so entirely with him—I am so sorry for him in his solitary position—that I could not but want to know what now had happened to him. You see, only a moment or two before he had been speaking of Amélie, and he appeared to think there was still a chance of her all at once throwing aside these present entangle-

ments, and going back to the old relationship that used to exist between him and her—the relationship she was so proud of when she first explained it to me. And this thing—whatever it was—seemed to startle him out of these dreams, for there was never a word more about them: you would have fancied he had received some sudden blow. Well, as soon as I was left alone, and saw my chance, I went round to Miss Dumaresq's chair and took up the book. I had no right to look, of course—but—but I did. And almost directly I discovered what had affected him so deeply. The sheet of note-paper may or may not have been a mark for her place in reading; but, at all events, she had been amusing herself by scribbling things on it; and there, as you could see at a glance, was Paul Hitrovo's name treated in different ways. But that was not all. She had gone on—with such musings in her brain as it is easy to guess at—to write, in a smaller hand,

the words '*Amélie d'Hitrovo*'—obviously an experiment to see how the signature would look—"

"But what madness to leave such a thing lying about on deck!" Peggy exclaimed.

"She must have been interrupted, have quickly shut up the volume, and then have forgotten all about it," the smaller woman said. "And these pencilled words were what Wolfenberg must have seen. That was the answer to his vague forecasts, his last despairing hopes about what the future might even yet have in store for him."

"Surely it is better he should know the worst at once," her companion said.

"Peggy, there is no 'better' in such a case," the other responded, sadly enough. "There can be nothing but tragic misery—for him, at least; what else can there be?"

Peggy hesitated.

"Something quite unexpected, perhaps. She is so wilful and head-strong: with a

character so impetuous as hers is, it is impossible to say what might not happen—"

But here she found her arm furtively grasped by her friend, as a warning. It was Wolfenberg himself who was approaching them.

"Why do you sit in the dark?" he said, in his grave, and placid, and kindly fashion. "Why do you not come and look at the moonlight and the hills? I little imagined that it was the shores of southern Russia that were going to give us a glimpse of the celestial mysteries."

CHAPTER VII.

"HOME, DEARIE, HOME!"

THE morning sun shone on the vivid green water, on the little white town, and on the abundant gardens and vineyards; and the air, cooled by the neighbourhood of the great encircling mountains, was pleasant and soft and sweet, when Peggy appeared at the top of the companion, herself fresher and fairer and more smiling than the dawn.

"Where is the Major?" she demanded, blithely enough. "I saw him a few minutes ago, and he said he would fetch some sago or rice, or something of that kind for the ringdove. Well, never mind; let's go and see if that wicked little hawk is any tamer yet."

For it must be explained that during the

voyage the sailors had managed to capture several birds—tired creatures that had taken refuge in the rigging; and these had been confined in rudely-constructed cages, to be taken home to England as pets. Moreover, as the big wicker-work crate in which Phaon was ignominiously shut up each night stood in a corner just aft of the butcher's den, there was here a convenient space for the stowage of these cages; so that our Orotanians had a kind of small aviary on board; and could when they chose amuse themselves by carrying food or drink to the feathered prisoners. On this occasion, however, the fact that Sappho's pet and the caged birds were in close proximity was destined to lead to lamentable results; for when the Major came along with a paper bag of grain in his hand, Phaon, recognising his deadly foe, began to growl and snarl.

"Oh, be quiet, you brute!" said the Major and he aimed a kick at the crate.

This only provoked the irate little animal within to fiercer barking. The Major pretended to take no notice. He handed the bag to Lady Cameron, who proceeded to shake out the grain into the cages. Then the Major, being unoccupied, turned his attention to the yelping cur.

"Will you be quiet, you little beast!" he muttered, angrily, and another kick shook the frail crate.

Alas! it shook it all too effectually. The catch sprung or fell out; the door came ajar; the next instant the furious Phaon had bounded forth and gripped his enemy by the foot of the trousers, worrying and tearing and hauling. At the same moment the Major, trying to kick him off, staggered back, and subsided on to the bench behind; the fabric of slight summer garment at once gave way; but Phaon, not satisfied with this amount of damage, renewed his attack, and seemed bent on getting hold of something more substantial

than a bit of cloth. How the onslaught might otherwise have ended it is impossible to determine; what happened was that one of the quartermasters, chancing to come by with a long iron rod in his hand, promptly applied that instrument to an inferior part of Phaon's person; a sudden howl, and a swift and growling retreat into the empty crate immediately followed; while the Major got on to his feet again, his face purple with passion, rage almost depriving him of the power of utterance.

"Here," said he to the quartermaster, in gasping tones, "g—give me that thing! I will prod the little devil's eyes out!"

"Oh, for shame!" said Lady Cameron, interposing, and sending the man away. "Why, you irritated the poor beast!" she said to the Major. "What could you expect?"

Now the Major had been neither frightened nor hurt, but he was simply insensate with

rage at having been made ridiculous in the eyes of this young lady.

"What could I expect?" he repeated, with a terrible effort at self-control that boded but ill for Phaon's future happiness. "Oh, perhaps so. Perhaps so. Very—very likely. But I have a long-standing account to settle with that disgusting little animal. Perhaps I provoked him. He has provoked me once or twice. We will see who has the final word."

"Now, Major, what do you mean?" said Peggy, seriously, and with hardly a glimmer of laughter in her eyes. "You would not harbour thoughts of revenge? It was a fair fight—until the quartermaster came in with an attack from the rear. You're not going to bear ill-will?"

"Ill-will? Oh, no," said he, darkly and gloomily. "What is the use of ill-will? But —but I mean to have it out with that infernal little beast. A public nuisance!—a nuisance

to the whole ship! But—but I will have some small kind of settling before long—*I think.* And in the meantime I suppose I shall have to go and get a change of clothes." And therewith he departed; and that was all we heard of this encounter—for the time being.

Now although we had many leagues of voyaging still before us, and many (to us) strange and unfamiliar places to visit, this remote little Russian town was the most easterly point of our travels; leaving Yalta, in short, we were leaving for home; and it was but natural that the least curious or enterprising among us should wish to go ashore for a brief space, and look round, and say good-bye. But while we were considering this matter, Amélie Dumaresq came up, and put her hand within Wolfenberg's arm in the most affectionate way, and said to him, reproachfully—

"Ernest, why are you always ready to go ashore with anybody except me? It is not

like you to forsake old friends. And I've just told mother I will not leave the ship at all this morning unless you come with us; and when I say 'come with us,' I mean with me —with me—you and I together—companions just as we have been many and many a time, through a good many years."

This was an extraordinary outburst, however obscure its origin. Wolfenberg's grave face flushed somewhat; but he laughed; and seemed inclined to treat her with a little gentle ridicule.

"There cannot be much forsaking, Amélie, on board ship, where we are thrown together the whole day long. All the same I will go with you, and very gladly."

He was about to turn to Mrs. Threepenny-bit; but the young lady anticipated him; she would have his usual companions come with her also; nay, she insisted on it, for she would not be guilty of dragging him away. Indeed, she was most kind and con-

siderate all the way round; and was most solicitous about the comfort of her mother (whose eyes were even more than ordinarily anxious and troubled, one of us thought); and appeared rather to guard against looking Hitrovo's way. Then, again, when we had got into the stern of the steam-launch and were making for the shore, she said——

"Ernest, don't you think there should be a complete frankness between intimate friends when it comes to the giving of a little present? Why should there be shyness and secrecy, when you would like to know what would be most appreciated? And so I tell you now that I want to get a little present for you here in Yalta; and you must be honest with me and let me know what would most please you. You see, this is the farthest point of this voyage; and I should like you to have some souvenir of it—perhaps engraved with Russian characters, if there is time—a little message from me to you, that would recall

a good many things whenever you saw it. What do you think, now?—something you could attach to your watch-chain; and you would be continually seeing it, wherever you might be—for—for who knows what may happen in the world?—but always, wherever you might be, you would have this little token with you, and you could say 'Well, Amélie gave me that, the day we were at Yalta. This is the message it carries—that she did not want to be forgotten, ever.'"

She seemed a little nervous and hysterical this morning; for a second there was a suspicion of moisture about the long black lashes; but she hastily brushed the half-formed tears away.

"You and I," she continued, "have known each other long enough, and intimately enough, to be quite frank; and you must come into a jeweller's shop with me, if there is such a thing in Yalta, and you must tell me what is best; you see, it is important—at least, I

consider it important; it may have to speak to you, for me, through many, many years; and every time you look at it, you will say to yourself 'That was when Amélie and I were sailing together, long and long ago; and she did not want to be forgotten.'"

He regarded her in a kindly fashion.

"À Saint-Blaise, à la Zuecca . nous étions heureux là?"

She looked startled and confused for a second, and glanced quickly and stealthily towards Paul Hitrovo.

"I remember the lines," she said, "but I was never quite sure what de Musset meant ——perhaps only a happy recollection——"

She could say no more, for at this moment the launch slowed in to the landing-stage, and we had to get out and ascend the wide stone steps.

This straggling contingent of foreigners, boldly headed by Amélie Dumaresq and her less self-assertive companion, now encountered

a motley crowd, who stared with obvious curiosity; and little wonder, seeing that the *Orotania*, as we afterwards learned, was the third English steamer that had ever appeared in these waters. And perhaps we also stared curiously at this miscellaneous assemblage—Greeks, Arabs, Jews, and here and there a typical Russian peasant, thick-set, long-haired, sun-tanned, with a strangely patient, apathetic, submissive look in his eyes. Moreover, our arrival was opportune; this was some kind of public holiday—the little white-domed church perched high on the deep-green hill kept tolling from time to time, in soft and musical tones; and these idlers had come out to see what was to be seen. The most adventurous among them were already negotiating for the hire of boats, that they might go out and beg to be allowed to inspect the nondescript vessel that had come from far climes.

When we got away from the crowded quay

we found the little white town quiet enough in the blaze of the noonday heat. And what may have mostly struck this little group of strangers, now wandering along, was the absence (in a watering-place) of big and prominent hotels, and the prevalence of neat and trim two-storeyed residences surrounded by well-kept gardens. But what Yalta was like, or was not like, was speedily driven from our minds by something of greater moment. Amélie had at length found the jeweller's shop she sought. It was not a very pretentious establishment, the chief feature in the window being a series of heads of the Madonna, enamelled in colours, with rays of brass emanating all round; likewise there was some damaskeened silver and also a few things studded with uncut torquoises and amethysts that perhaps had a certain novelty about them. However, she would have Wolfenberg go into this place, to see if she could discover what she wanted; and

at the same moment she turned to Hitrovo, who was standing by.

"Won't you come," said she, without addressing him either by Christian name or surname, "and help us? Perhaps they speak only Russian."

So he followed also; and the very instant he had disappeared, Mrs. Dumaresq turned quickly to the elder woman of our party.

"Has Amélie said anything to you?" she asked, in an eager and anxious undertone. "It was only this morning she told me. It is quite settled between her and Hitrovo."

"I have suspected as much during the last day or two," said Mrs. Threepenny bit, calmly. "And I made sure of it just now, as we were coming ashore in the launch."

"But what am I to do?" said the mother, who seemed in a most distracted and bewildered and helpless state. "I have no one to consult. I am quite unable to do anything, for Amélie would pay no heed to whatever

I might say. And yet her uncle down in Florida will hold me responsible; and I ought to write to him; I must write to him; and at the same time I know what his first questions will be. He will want to be told all about the young man, about his character, his position, his prospects, and his family. But what am I to answer him?" she went on in a piteous fashion. "What can I say? I am in absolute ignorance. And it is useless to remonstrate with Amélie—useless to ask her to postpone any definite arrangement until her Uncle Charles could come over. Of course, if this marriage is persisted in, he must come over in any case: there will be all the settlements to be seen to. If she were not so self-willed!—if she would only wait! You cannot tell these last few days how frightened I have been to see her open preference; I saw what it would come to; and yet I knew it was no use interfering. And what am I to do now?—what can I do?"

Now it was not of Paul Hitrovo that the smaller woman was thinking, nor yet of Uncle Charles, nor even of Amélie Dumaresq herself: it was of another person altogether—it was of Wolfenberg. Nevertheless she had to respond to this tremulous and despairing appeal with such ordinary assurances as she could devise.

"I am certain," she said, "that any one who knows Amélie will not hold you responsible for any decision she may have come to; and surely a young woman should be allowed to choose for herself whom she will marry. And don't you think she has had plenty of opportunities of studying his character during this voyage? But—but—Mrs. Dumaresq, about Mr. Wolfenberg: have you told him?"

"That is another thing," the poor lady said quickly. "Would you be so very, very kind as to do that for me some time or other? He sits and talks with you in the evening; you could find some chance when there was no

one to overhear; because, of course, it must be kept an absolute secret from the people on the ship. Your party were to know, she said, because you and Wolfenberg had become such intimate friends; and I was to tell Wolfenberg. But — but somehow I shrink from it—and it is so difficult to find an opportunity—and if you now would be so very, very kind—" At this moment the three who had gone into the shop reappeared; and she instantly added, with a studied indifference of voice and manner: "As I was saying, Amélie is well advised in giving her diamond case to the Purser, to be locked up in his strong box, whenever we come into a harbour. It would never do to have such things lying about in her cabin, and strangers coming on board."

That afternoon, on our return to the *Orotania*, Mrs. Threepenny-bit's state-room seemed the safest retreat, to be out of the way of our Russian visitors who were now

swarming all over the vessel. And of course and at once the talk turned upon the announcement of the morning. It was a climax, to be sure, that all of us had foreseen; and yet the certainty of it, thus suddenly declared, produced something almost like dismay—when we thought of that other.

"So this is the end," said the smaller of the two women. "This is the end of her romantic devotion and attachment. This is the end of her convictions about marriage being the great disillusioniser; about an exalted friendship and affection being the most perfect and most lasting relationship between a man and a woman of thoroughly sympathetic minds and tastes. This is the end of the atonement she proposed to make for what he had suffered elsewhere; the end of her courageous determination to stand by him, scorning the ordinary ways of life. And it is as I had feared all along," she continued, in a pensive way. "When you came to me,

at first, Peggy, and described that ideal companionship, I confess it looked very beautiful and noble; but I asked you how any kind of permanence was to be secured for it. Human nature is strong; and the ordinary ways of life draw your feet into them whether you will or not."

"I don't believe it," said Peggy, bluntly. "That relationship between him and her might have continued to exist securely enough if only she had had a firmer and finer character, a more tenacious resolution, and a little less of the selfishness of a spoilt child. Did you never hear of a woman giving up thoughts of marriage because of what she considered a higher duty? I have, then, more than once, in my own small experience. But the simple fact is that Amélie Dumaresq is all-important to herself. Her strength of character doesn't lie in the way of sacrifice at all, but in a kind of impetuous belief that the whole of the surrounding world should be subservient

to her, and should rejoice and acquiesce in whatever tends to her happiness. It is wonderful to look at—it is so childlike, so unconscious. You can hardly be angry with her, it is all so natural. And yet, Missis, when you think what it is you have to tell Wolfenberg—when you think what it means to him——"

She paused, and regarded her friend.

"I wish I had not undertaken any such task," the other said, slowly. "And yet I remember his face as he talked to me on the Acropolis at Athens. He has the most heroic unselfishness and an inflexible fortitude. It is not of his own share in this thing that he will speak, whatever he may suffer. I could almost tell you what he will say. It is her happiness, and that alone, that he will take into consideration."

"I think the best thing he can do," the younger woman said, absently, "is to leave this ship as soon as ever we get back to Constantinople."

"Don't you remember, then, Peggy, that I thought he ought to have gone away long before we ever got there?"

"I suppose it is an inevitable consequence," her companion continued, almost unheeding. "When a married man falls in love with an unmarried young woman, misery is sure to come of it, for one or other of them, or for both. I know you don't think he is in love with her, at least consciously: you think the situation is entirely as she described it—a romantic companionship of two twin-souls; but his obedience to her slightest wish, his constant defence of her, his extraordinary admiration of whatever she does or says, his eager gratitude to you for any commendation of her, and the way his eyes soften with kindliness whenever he looks at her—well, if all that isn't love, I don't know the symptoms. At the same time, I quite agree with you that when you make this communication to him he will be quite reticent, and simple, and

self-controlled; he will probably express pleasure, and ask when he may be allowed to take his congratulations to her; but don't you be deceived by that, Missis: there are deeps in that man's nature that he does not choose to reveal. I have not watched him so long and so closely for nothing."

And perhaps the elder woman would have been glad to have had her painful mission accomplished and off her mind, but that no chance offered itself during this evening. Hardly had the last of our Russian visitors left the ship than the dinner-hour was upon us; and, naturally, the big saloon was no place for private confidences. On the other hand, Amélie, on this occasion, claimed Wolfenberg as her own, and was kindness itself to him. She seemed a little excited and happy. She was immensely pleased with everything she had seen in Yalta, and especially with the serious bearing of the Russian country folk.

"I thought they had a most vacant, unintelligent expression," put in Mrs. Dumaresq, rather peevishly: perhaps she had grown tired of praises of things Russian.

"Oh, matushka," cried the young lady—this being her newly-invented name for her mother—"how can you say so! I'm sure I preferred their dignified unconcern to the observant quickness and inquisitiveness of the Greeks and Jews. But then I don't like self-conscious smartness and spryness, and shallow cleverness: we get a good deal too much of that at home. I've often heard it said that the American eye is more alert than the European eye——"

"Do you know why that is so, Amélie?" Wolfenberg said, with a smile. "It is because the early settlers were trained to keep a sharp look-out if they meant to preserve their scalps."

"There is nothing to me more contemptible," she continued, pursuing her remorseless

way, "than the funny young man in our country, his eyelids all quivering with his anxiety to say something humorous. And he need not be so concerned; it is so easily done. When one of our funny young men wants to make himself amusing, either in print or in talking, he has only to represent himself as the victim of all kinds of discomforts and humiliating experiences. It is an easy trick to raise a laugh. But I prefer a little dignity — a little self-respect. Why should people be so anxious to display their cleverness, their knowingness? Why should they want to show off, unless through some distressing consciousness of inferiority? For my part, I would rather have the insolent indifference of the Englishman than the eager self-assertion of the American. And I tell you I have a greater admiration for the grave and reserved manner and bearing of those Russian peasants than I have for all the nonchalance and nimble-wittedness of

the very smartest of our hotel-clerks at home——"

"Amélie," the poor mother complained, "it is very strange that you should so have taken to running down your own country. You would be very angry if you heard any one else say such things."

She burst out laughing, quite good-naturedly.

"Why, then, do you drive me into argument, matushka? Why will you be so contentious? Why will you quarrel? I declare, when I looked at those Russian country people —there were some of them at the quay when we came away—I was very nearly going up to them, and saying to them, *da svidania!*"

"And what is that?" Wolfenberg said.

"'*Da suidania?*' Oh, that is *au revoir*," she made answer, with much cheerfulness.

Nor, again, after dinner, was there any opportunity of conveying this fateful piece of news to him, for Amélie herself detained

him in the saloon. Was she going to play to him certain of those plantation melodies for which he had a boyish fondness; or did she wish to show him her first groupings for the 'Oats-pease-beans' subject; or had she it in her mind to get the Russian, who also remained below, and him better acquainted? At all events, they did not for a long time make their appearance on deck, though the beauty of the night might well have tempted them: there was a full moon, and a perfectly glassy sea—the long and trembling lane of silver ran away out to the horizon line, where it widened, sharp and clear against the receding softness of the sky.

"I suppose I must wait until to-morrow," said one of two women who were slowly walking up and down, arm-in-arm, "though I would rather have it done with at once. To tell you the truth, Peggy, I am a little afraid. What you say about the way he will probably take the news is, no doubt, quite

right; but still, when you imagine that a man is inwardly suffering, and outwardly steeling himself, it seems cruel to look on. And then I am an intruder. Why should I be asked to interfere——"

"Because that distressed creature of a mother is about out of her mind," said Peggy at once. "I should not be surprised if she telegraphed to the uncle in Florida to come over without delay. Let me see: what is the next port we call at—Moudanieh? And of course, one can telegraph from Asia Minor to the United States. But, even then, what would be the use? The thing is done. Amélie Dumaresq is not the sort of girl to be reasoned or threatened out of any resolve she has arrived at."

"I wish my message was delivered," her companion rejoined: clearly it was of Wolfenberg she was thinking—not of those others at all.

The Major came along.

"Splendid night, eh?—beautiful picture, ain't it?" said, he in his buoyant fashion. "Are you ladies going to wait up to see the start?—eleven-thirty prompt. Lights out at eleven, as usual; but there is little need for lights on a night like this."

"Eleven-thirty, did you say?" Lady Cameron asked.

"Eleven-thirty," he repeated. "And then we are off for home. And if we were to leave one of our passengers behind at this turning-point, he would find some difficulty in getting back to England, eh, wouldn't he?"

He grinned in a curious manner; but his meaning remained dark and impenetrable.

"Why should we leave any one behind?" asked Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "Surely, every one knows that we sail to-night?"

Again he grinned to himself, but he did not reply, for he had stepped into the moonlight to pick a cigar from his case; then, when he came back under the awning, he found that

these two were talking of something else; and presently he had taken his departure, doubtless making away for those spacious and comfortable lower regions devoted to smoke, and cards, and cooling drinks.

They were now standing by the rail, looking wistfully at the wonderful scenic display before them: the white town asleep in the calm, wan radiance; the darkly-wooded lower hills, with here and there a châlet brought into sharp relief; then the mighty range of mountains, with mysterious breadths of forest; and far above these, towering into the serene and cloudless heavens, the precipitous crags and summits grown grey and spectral in the moonlight.

"Yes," said Peggy, "I seem to have drank in happiness and enjoyment every moment since I came on board this ship; and yet there is something in the word 'home.' I dare say when we get to Greenock—and I do hope Ewen will manage to meet me at

Malta, so that we may go home together—I dare say Greenock will be as rainy, and dirty, and grimy as usual; and it may be wet and windy going down the Firth; and perhaps freshening up to gales and storms as we get out west and make away for the north; but I don't care; I think, after these long weeks of blue seas and constant sunlight, I should like to watch Ardnamurchan headland growing black and terrible in the face of an Atlantic squall——"

"You like weather as is weather," her friend said. "They have taught you that at least in the West Highlands."

"I like a touch of wildness, anyway," she confessed, "—something to come along and shake the chromo-lithographic element out of the world around you. Give me an ulster, a Tam-o'-Shanter, and a pair of thick boots, and I don't want anything better than fighting my way down to the seashore in the teeth of a westerly gale, with the spindrift tasting salt.

No, Missis, you won't catch me grumbling about Greenock and the rain and the mud when I find myself on the quay, waiting for the big steamer with the two red funnels." She put her hand on the hand of her friend as they were both of them leaning with pensive elbows on the rail; and now she spoke in a lower voice—for there were people about: "Missis, do you remember the old rhyme?—it does for Greenock as well as any other seaport—

'O Greenock is a fine town, with ships in the bay,
And I wish from my heart it's there I was to-day;
I wish from my heart I was far away from here,
Sitting in my parlour and talking to my dear.
For it's home, dearie, home—it's home I want to be;
Our topsails are hoisted, and we'll away to sea:
O the oak, and the ash, and the bonny birken tree,
They grow so green in the North Countrie!'"

"And a very pretty specimen of an American you are!" her companion exclaimed: after which indisputable statement of fact nothing more was said on the subject. It is

a far cry to Greenock from Yalta beyond the Chersonese.

At eleven all lights except the necessary ship's lights were extinguished; but that, as the Major had observed, was of little consequence; the whole of the world around us was illuminated by this mild white splendour that seemed to fill the slumbering air. Many had gone below for good; but a few had come up from the saloon to witness the start—among these being Amélie Dumaresq, her Russian lover, and Wolfenberg. Here, too, was Sappho, ecstatic about the spectral mountains; the Baby had joined her sister—and Julian Verrinder was in meek attendance; the Major alone was unaccountably absent. We waited, mostly in silence, counting the minutes; and, indeed, so perfect was the quietude astern that, just before seven bells struck, we heard a sudden splash some way further forward.

"What can that be?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"Perhaps the stokers throwing cinders overboard," Peggy suggested.

"Oh, nonsense! They never do that at this time of night," was the reply.

But there was no further thought of this thing, for at the same moment a vibration underneath us told us that the screw had begun to revolve. Peggy rose, and put her arm affectionately round her friend's waist.

"'It's home, dearie, home.'"

"Yes—and it's time to go below, too," responded her companion, as together they set out for their cabins.

Just then a figure was seen to emerge from the dark shadow underneath the boat-deck, to pass rapidly across by the engine-hatches, and to disappear in the direction of the stairs leading down to the fore saloon.

"Wasn't that the Major?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"I think so," answered Peggy, looking puzzled.

"Why should he steal away from us like that," she demanded, "without saying good-night? And what did he mean by his mysterious talk about a passenger being left behind?"

But it was no time for the asking or answering of idle conundrums—it was time, rather, to get to bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.

THERE is a story told of a Scotch minister who had married a remarkably ill-favoured wife and who (perhaps to excuse himself before the people) was much given to vaunting her spiritual graces and excellences. "She is all glorious within," he remarked on one occasion to a neighbour. "Man, Jamie," replied the too-familiar friend, "it's a sair peety ye canna flipe her"—to *flipe*, in Scotland, meaning to turn a stocking inside out. And, if at times we were tempted to say something of the same sort of our perfervid poetess, our peerless Sappho—the splendour of whose soul found no fit exponent in her rather dowdy

figure and lethargic features—there were other times in which she did her very best to appear cheerful, and sympathetic, and kind; and then we forgave her everything. On this particular morning, as we were labouring onwards through the brilliant and swift-glancing waters of the Black Sea, Sappho seemed pre-eminently amiable of mood.

"How good-natured those sailors are," she said, as she came up to Lady Cameron and the Major. "I suppose it is the monotony of their lives makes them so fond of pets. Fancy their being before me even at this early hour; they have taken Phaon out of his crate; and I have no doubt they have carried him off to give him a share of their breakfast."

"It is a good thing Phaon is not a parrot," observed Lady Cameron, demurely, "if they have taken him away into the fore-castle."

At this, Sappho looked a little alarmed.

"Yes," said she, "I had not thought of that. Their manners may be rather rough."

She turned to the quartermaster, who was arranging the deck-chairs. "Quartermaster," she said, "would you be so kind as to go and fetch me my little dog? The men must have taken him below."

"Very well, madam," was the civil reply; and away the quartermaster went.

He was gone for a considerable time. When he returned, the news he brought with him was sufficient to paralyse the boldest: nothing could be seen or heard anywhere of the missing Phaon, while it was absolutely certain he had not been taken below by the sailors. Sappho did not appear to comprehend. She stared at the man in a stunned, bewildered fashion.

"Not in the ship? What do you mean!" she cried, in a gasping sort of way. "I don't understand you. He must be in the ship!—I saw him myself last night as late as eleven o'clock—I know he was not left ashore, for I brought him on board myself—he was safe

in that crate—I saw him—I saw him myself——"

"It seems incredible that he should have jumped over the side during the night," observed the Major, regarding her calmly; "and yet how otherwise can one account for his disappearance? No one could be so inhuman as to pitch him overboard. It is true he has been rather snappy with some of the passengers; and I may say he bit myself yesterday morning; but that is nothing—nothing at all—a mere trifle——"

She turned from him impatiently, and addressed herself again to the quartermaster.

"Come and show me where you have looked—an instant search must be made—where is the butcher?—you must bring him before the Purser—before the Captain—there must not be a moment's delay——"

And therewith she dragged the man away with her—to arouse and scour the startled ship.

When we next saw Sappho, a marvellous change had come over her. There was nothing left of the amiability of the morning; she had also passed out of that mood of blank consternation with which she had at first heard the news; she had become a tempestuous fury, with malignant hatred sparkling in her eyes and vibrating in her voice.

"Now I see—now I understand," she said to Lady Cameron—and, fortunately, the Major had gone away—"it is that fiend, that incarnate fiend, who has done it; I know it; I am convinced of it; and yet he had the hardihood to stare me in the face and say that no one could be so inhuman as to throw my poor little Phaon overboard! And I suppose he thinks the same monstrous effrontery will carry him through now? The darkness of the night covered the scoundrelly and treacherous and murderous deed; and, therefore, he is to escape? But he shall not!" Miss Penguin went on, with a vehemence

of passion that was terrible to see. "He shall not escape! He may try to brazen it out with denials; he may call for proofs, for witnesses; and, of course, I have no proofs, and no witnesses. But what will he say when he receives a slap in the face? A slap in the face; yes, and from a man who can fight, too—from Anton Ruhe—I will appeal to my friend Anton Ruhe——"

"Oh, Miss Penguin!" Peggy exclaimed, in gentle deprecation. This Anton Ruhe we all of us knew as a fire-eating revolutionary (in the monthly magazines, chiefly), and what might he not do if called upon to avenge a wronged and insulted damsel? "Do you think it is fair to accuse any one without evidence? And is it so very serious, after all? Supposing—just supposing"—she went on (for she had a distinct recollection of seeing a suspicious figure skulk across the moonlit deck on the preceding night)—"supposing some one had been bitten by the dog, or had

a dislike to it, and supposing that person, whoever he is, really did throw Phaon overboard, just as the ship was starting last night, it was hard-hearted enough, no doubt; but all the same not much harm could have been done, for Phaon would simply swim ashore; and he may live many, many years in Russia, in perfect happiness——"

"No," said Sappho, with a certain dignity; "I cannot cheat my mind by considering impossibilities. Phaon was—was rather stout; he could never reach the shore. He has been cruelly murdered, and I know by whom. And knowing who the coward is, do you think I will let him escape? I tell you my vengeance will reach him, in spite of all the oaths and perjuries he may bring to blacken his face with. A slap on the cheek! He wears Her Majesty's uniform: how will he take a slap on the cheek? Anton Ruhe will come when I call him; and then we will see how denials and subterfuges will serve that base and

brutal murderer. My poor Phaon!—my poor Phaon!—" And here she turned aside, furtively pulling out her handkerchief; and we also withdrew, for sorrow is sacred; but it was Lady Cameron who went and sought out the Major, and told him that, if he really had been guilty of this atrocious and abominable crime, he would hear more about it as soon as he reached England. The Major looked at her—looked steadfastly at her eyes, but did not commit himself to speech.

There were no land-features to attract attention during this blazing and basking day; we had nothing around us save the tumultuous tossing and heaving of the blue-black waves, with a blinding shimmer of diamonds away towards the sun. Accordingly, our good Orotanians settled themselves down to their usual occupations—chess, cribbage, letter-writing, reading, and conversation in quiet corners: and the time went by pleasantly enough until Peggy appeared once more upon the scene.

"What has become of Emily?" she demanded. "I haven't caught a glimpse of her all the morning. Surely, he can't have thrown *her* overboard?"

Well, when one came to think of it, the Baby had not been visible since breakfast.

"She may have been invited into the chart-room," one ventured to suggest. "We shall be going through the Bosphorus again to-morrow, and the younger officers are always very civil."

"Where is Mr. Verrinder?" she said, looking round sharply.

There was no Mr. Verrinder. No, nor was Ernest Wolfenberg anywhere to be seen. Had this diabolical Major been dealing death and destruction all the way round? At all events, we formed a search-party—it was something to pass the time withal—and proceeded to explore the ship. When we came upon the truants, they formed a very engaging group. We found them in the fore saloon—a section

of the vessel rarely occupied during the day, except, perhaps, by a chance lady's-maid engaged in needle-work; and they were up at the further end, under the broad glare of the skylights. Wolfenberg was at work on the portrait-picture; his model sat some little distance off; and close to her, and face to face with her, was young Verrinder. So far as we could make out, Wolfenberg was not listening; his absent eyes were fixed on the upright board before him, as though he were intent on reading suggestions into the outlines there; so that the young folk were left to entertain each other, and were apparently doing so, very much to their mutual satisfaction. And the subject? Round the Baby's head, and falling upon her shoulders, were some folds of silken gauze—black, with here and there a white star. Was she personating the Dawn, then—the shadows of night still hanging over her yet, with the smile of the new day lighting up her face? For clearly

this was no sombre theme. We could imagine Julian Verrinder's having begged and prayed that the picture should be as much a portrait as possible; perhaps he had humbly entreated for some little cheerfulness also; perhaps the artist had good-naturedly assented; perhaps he had even said to the young man, 'Very well, you sit and talk to her; amuse her; the more animation in her face the better.' So here were Ferdinand and Miranda, entirely wrapped up in themselves, eyes answering eyes, smiles answering smiles; while the solitary magician, busy with his spells and dreams, was as good as a thousand miles away.

It was a very charming group, viewed from the dim twilight of this corridor; but it did not at all seem to please Lady Cameron.

"Really," said she, "it is most inconsiderate of Mr. Verrinder to interfere. How can Mr. Wolfenberg get on with his work if she is kept laughing and chattering? Her face is

naturally calm and serious. And she is too amiable to resent his intrusion."

"She certainly does not seem to resent it," observed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, gravely.

"Besides, I don't like the notion of his becoming possessed of that picture," she proceeded, with unwonted displeasure marking her tone. "It is not right. His having it might lead to quite ridiculous conjectures on the part of a stranger; and Emily does not understand such things; she is easily led; she will do anything to be obliging; and it does not occur to her that it is an impertinence on Mr. Verrinder's part to ask her for her portrait, for that is what it comes to. I don't like it at all—"

At this moment Wolfenberg rose and stepped back a yard or two to regard his work; then he returned to the table, and laid down his palette—the model was to have a few seconds' rest. And, thereupon, Lady Cameron and her companions made bold to enter the saloon.

"I hope we have not interrupted you," said she, going forward to Wolfenberg—but taking scrupulous care not to overlook the sketch. "Did you hear us talking in the corridor? No? I'm afraid you'll find Emily a bad sitter; she ought not to be laughing and chatting when you are studying her face—"

"Oh, but I am responsible for that, Lady Cameron," said young Verrinder, blushing furiously. "And—and it was with Mr. Wolfenberg's permission. You don't suppose I would do anything to endanger the likeness; it is a matter of too great moment—of course I don't mean the likeness," he went on, stammering and blundering, "but the picture—Mr. Wolfenberg said I might come and sit and talk—he rather wished her to have a cheerful expression—he said I might come and talk to her—"

"The fact is," Wolfenberg interposed, in his equable and kindly fashion, "it was a pure piece of laziness on my part. I wanted your

sister to look interested; and I ought myself to have tried to talk to her; but I thought a simpler way would be to get Mr. Verrinder to come and chat with her. It is so easy for two young people to amuse each other; while an old fogey has to labour at it—until his model is like to fall asleep." He took up his palette again. "No, you need not go—if you care to stay," he said. "I want to have Miss Emily forget that I am looking at her: it does not matter how many are talking to her."

But it was clear that our presence was embarrassing to those two young people who had been thus unexpectedly caught. The poor Baby was no longer smiling with the smile of the dawn, under the soft folds of the departing night; self-conscious colour was in her face; her great eyes were timid and confused. Julian Verrinder, too, had been struck dumb; his anxious schemes for the success of this treasure of a picture had been

set at naught; it was we who were the intruders. And so we came away again—leaving Ferdinand and Miranda to entertain each other in their sea-bound cave, while the arch-magician (who had perhaps planned this little arrangement out of mere sympathy and kindness of heart) would no doubt return to his incantations and spells, and that so as not to interfere too much with their pretty occupation.

Now this withdrawal of Wolfenberg from his customary haunts afforded Mrs. Threepenny-bit some measure of unlooked-for relief; it was an excuse for her postponing the fulfilment of the onerous task that had been placed upon her. And there is no doubt the small woman shrank from that with an ever-increasing apprehension, despite her professions of confidence in Wolfenberg's firmness and fortitude and unselfish courage.

"After all, Peggy," she said, "however he may take it, it is something to have the plans

for one's lifetime suddenly shattered, and just as he seemed to be looking forward to long years of sympathy and affection and close companionship. And if it was a delusion to think that such a bond could be made secure and permanent, it was she who led him into the delusion: who could have spoken about it with greater enthusiasm than herself? And why should I have to go and tell him that all these dreams were a mockery—that she has thrown him over, abandoned her career, forgotten all her fine ambitions, simply because of the mysterious charm of a young Russian's blue-grey eyes? I suppose what she has done is only natural—it is like a woman——"

"It is not like a woman at all!" said Peggy, with some warmth. "It is the action of a spoilt, heartless, thoughtless coquette. The only fine thing about it is the very magnificence of her selfishness and unconcern; I dare say she will take it quite as a matter of course that he should congratulate her,

that he should be well content, and even delighted at being allowed to look on at her happiness——"

She stopped. By this time the evening had drawn on; there was a full moon, of a dull saffron hue, in the south-east; and across the lapping waters shone a curious golden-green radiance, broken everywhere by the sharp shadows of the waves. The two women were standing by the rail, talking in an undertone. But there now approached them a creature all in white, or perhaps in pale yellow and white; she was dressed for dinner and bare-headed; she swung her handkerchief to and fro; she was singing to herself, and that in a careless fashion—

'Afar from her his heart is breaking'

—and we recognised the familiar 'Troika' air. But when she came up she said, cheerfully enough—

"Has any one seen anything of Mr. Wolfenberg? I hear he has been at work all day;

but he can't be painting now. Ah, well, he will turn up at dinner-time, anyway." And off she went again, through the mysterious twilight, like some large phantasmal white moth.

Mrs. Threepenny-bit looked after her.

"I wish she would go and find him," she said, bitterly, "and take him the story of her broken faith herself!"

"Oh, Missis, she could hardly do that!" Peggy exclaimed. "A girl is always shy about her engagement—about the first one, any way; and however case-hardened and confident Amélie Dumaresq may be—still the relations between her and Wolfenberg have been peculiar——"

"But why should I be dragged in!" the elder woman again protested, almost with indignation. "I am an outsider. Why should I be asked to undertake a duty that may be painful beyond words? It isn't fair——"

"You are Wolfenberg's friend," Peggy said, persuasively. "The mother, who ought to tell him, is nervous and afraid; she has appealed to you; and I don't see anybody who could break the news to him with equal tact and delicacy. So you've got to do it, Missis; and Wolfenberg himself will be grateful to you, I am certain."

But still she hesitated, dreading she hardly knew what. After dinner that evening, these two were again on deck. The moon was higher and clearer now; and the light on the water was of a brilliant silver, splintering itself on the jagged edges of the waves. Of course on such an exquisite evening no human creature could think of remaining in the saloon; so that there were more people walking about than usual; nevertheless there still remained a corner where one could talk in quiet.

"Did you hear what the Dumaresqs propose to do?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, eagerly, to

her friend. "They mean to go with the indefatigables this time—that is, to-morrow afternoon, as soon as we reach Moudanieh: there is to be a general stampede ashore, and hiring of carriages, and driving away inland to Broussa, to pass the night there, and have the whole of the next day for the bazaars. At least, I gather that is what the Dumaresqs have in view; I should not wonder if Amélie wanted a lot of silks and stuffs from Asia Minor to form part of her trousseau. Now, do you see this, Peggy: if we decide to remain on board to-morrow afternoon—driving out to Broussa the next morning—I am quite certain that Mr. Wolfenberg will prefer to stay with us; and then, the ship being practically empty, ourselves all by ourselves, wouldn't that be a safe opportunity to convey that message to him, without fear of interruption? Don't you think, Peggy, I ought to wait till to-morrow evening? Mrs. Dumaresq has left it to my own discretion; and, of course, I

want to make sure that there will be no onlooker—no stranger—coming about."

Well, Peggy agreed; she had not the heart to grudge this respite to her friend, who seemed singularly anxious; so that the evil hour was again put off, until the following evening, when we should find ourselves in solitary occupation of the ship.

Early next morning we encountered a bit of a rough-and-tumble down towards the south-western limits of the Black Sea; but by and by a change to smoother water told us we had entered the Bosphorus; and eventually all motion ceased—the screw no longer throbbed—we were in a strange and unaccountable stillness. Dressing was hurried over; we got up on deck; and then the explanation was obvious—we were waiting for permission to pass, in other words, the Doctor and Purser had gone ashore for pratique. Opposite us were the frowning batteries of Kavak—massive forts and bastions bristling with cannon; while

through the silence of the morning rang the shrill and melancholy bugle-call of the Turkish soldiers. And, after all, our period of detention was not unreasonably long; the Purser and Doctor returned to the ship; and presently we had resumed our route—making away down through the narrow Straits that separate the European and Asian worlds.

And here was the timid and blushing Baby coming up to Wolfenberg with a startling proposal.

"Mr. Wolfenberg," said she, and there was a kind of abashed appeal and hesitation in the large and soft and winning eyes, "if you would rather go on with the picture, you must tell me frankly. I—I hope you will study your own convenience—that is, any time you wish I will go along to the fore-saloon—now, if you like——"

He looked at her—in no unkindly fashion. Well he knew who had put this suggestion into her young mind.

"No, no," said he, "I could not accept such a piece of self-sacrifice. Don't you know that the shores of the Bosphorus are extraordinarily beautiful, and as interesting as they are beautiful; and yet you would go away down below, and sit constrained, and see nothing of what was going by? Tell Mr. Verrinder not to be so impatient—so impetuous."

It was a random shaft, and not meant to wound; but it struck home all the same, and the Baby retired in sad confusion. Her sister, on the other hand, seemed a little incensed by this proposal.

"Mr. Verrinder?" she said to Wolfenberg. "Do you think it was he who prompted Emily to come to you just now and make that offer? Really, I think he is going too far! What right has he to interfere at all?"

"Young men are naturally impatient," Wolfenberg said.

"Young men are naturally impertinent!'

she made answer. "But I will warn Emily. She must keep him at a proper distance. The idea of his going secretly to her and suggesting that you should be asked to shut yourself up at one of the most interesting parts of the voyage! You see, Emily is so simple a kind of creature, so innocent of anything like concealment or secresy, she does not understand that these confidences are really compromising. Why should he go to her instead of coming straight to you? I like the young fellow very well; he is frank and modest, good-looking and well-mannered, pleasant enough in every way; but I must see he does not presume on Emily's ignorance of the world. She must keep him in his place. And I hope, Mr. Wolfenberg, that if he does become possessed of that picture, it will be so clearly an allegorical subject that no one could possibly mistake it for a portrait of Emily—it would be too absurd for him to have *that*."

And so, after all, the ingenuous mind of the

Baby was not deprived of its series of brilliant object-lessons. The varied and beautiful panorama passed gradually before her eyes—wood-crowned heights, ruddy of soil, with dark green foliage; then white and pink villages stretching along the shore and scattered here and there on the hill-sides; deeply-indented bays, with English yachts and every kind of foreign craft lying at anchor; ancient walls and fortifications, with tall Genoese towers; and now and again a spacious palace, a lordly pleasure-house, shining in white splendour amidst overhanging and luxurious gardens. As we steamed slowly by the quays of Tophane and came once more in sight of the Golden Horn, a slight morning haze still hung over the great city, over the crowded domes and minarets, and over the grey mosques and black cypresses of Stamboul. The sun was hot; the still water shimmered in the light; this was altogether more like the Constantinople of pictorial tradition; and this was the

vision, vast and imposing, that stealthily and imperceptibly receded from us as we again got under weigh, making for the wider spaces of the Sea of Marmora, and the distant shores of Asia Minor.

It was a dream-like kind of day. Now and again we passed a motionless ship, its yellow sails reflected vividly on the glassy plain; but for the most part we seemed to be gliding into a voiceless and mysterious ocean, with nothing but a film of land along the southern horizon visible through the haze of heat. And then, towards the afternoon, as we were crossing the Gulf of Moudanieh, the ghost of a mountain appeared, far away inland and towering above the hills nearer the coast: this vague phantom of a thing was the Bithynian Mount Olympus. The land drew nearer; we began to make out colours. Then more particular features: green slopes of olive and mulberry coming down to the shore; a scattered little red-roofed village, with two

or three white minarets; a rude wooden pier jutting out from the line of breaking surf. Finally came the sudden roar of the anchor-chain; and we were now lying off Moudanieh, the Greek village which serves as port to the once-famous Broussa.

It all fell out as Mrs. Threepenny-bit had predicted. The Dumaresqs and their Russian friend went away with the busy folk who had resolved on at once setting out for Broussa; and Wolfenberg, who had not been consulted about this arrangement, nor even pressed to join, seemed to prefer remaining on board, especially when he found he was to have some small measure of company. Practically, we had the whole ship to ourselves; and again and again on this still and beautiful evening —a full moon was shining over the distant village and over the olive-crowned slopes, while not a sound broke the slumbering silence—again and again the unwilling and anxious intermediary had an opportunity of

fulfilling her mission; and just as often her courage failed her. Nay, it was not until we were assembled in the saloon at dinner—the two or three of us—that she found sufficient nerve; she seemed to want help; she would treat this thing as an ordinary piece of news —though under a pledge of secresy.

"Oh, Mr. Wolfenberg," said she, with a smile—a ghastly smile, when one knew that her heart was throbbing like to suffocate her, "I have something to tell you—and yet I suppose you may have guessed—but a girl does not like to speak of such things—and—and so I have been asked to let you know: it is about Amélie." He said nothing: he only regarded her. Then she hurried on breathlessly: "It is quite settled between her and Mr. Hitrovo: she has accepted him."

No one dared to look his way. If there was any quick quiver of the eyes, any sudden paleness of the lips at this abrupt confirmation of what he must have for some time back

suspected, it was unseen. And when he spoke, after a second of constrained silence, it was with a studied and perfect calmness that showed an admirable fortitude and self-command.

"It is quite settled, then?" he asked, in rather a low voice.

"Yes," she answered; but then she was driven to add in a desperate kind of way: "Of course, who can tell what may happen? —who can tell? It is settled, I understand—yes, at present—but she might see fit to change her mind; and she has strength of character enough to carry out any decision——"

"If Amélie Dumaresq marries," he said, slowly, "the world will have lost a great artist."

Not a word about himself, nor about the wreckage of all the fine and wistful schemes he and she had planned together. Perhaps he had not time to realise that as yet. It was of her alone he was thinking.

"And it may be she is right; it may be that is the true way," he said, absently. "But what a responsibility the man undertakes. In her case disappointment would mean destruction; and to destroy a life like hers, so full of splendid capacities, so passionately eager, so hopeful, and ardent, and overbrimming with the joy of existence—No, it is not to be thought of, or spoken of," he said again. "Amélie was born to be happy. Happiness appears to surround her; she seems to breathe it as the very atmosphere in which she lives. Well, well: good-bye to the famous artist—now we have to look forward to the happy wife."

All this was very brave—and reassuring, indeed; there was not a trace or symptom of any inward anguish; his idle schemes and dreams might go—what were they as compared with the pulsating hopes and desires of a rich young life? Only we noticed that he did not come up on deck after dinner, as

was his wont. He remained below in the saloon, his face in shadow, an unopened book in his hand, his fingers clenched round it. And it is to be imagined that none of us were anxious to break in upon this dark hour of retrospect, and renunciation, and forecast.

END OF VOL. II.

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